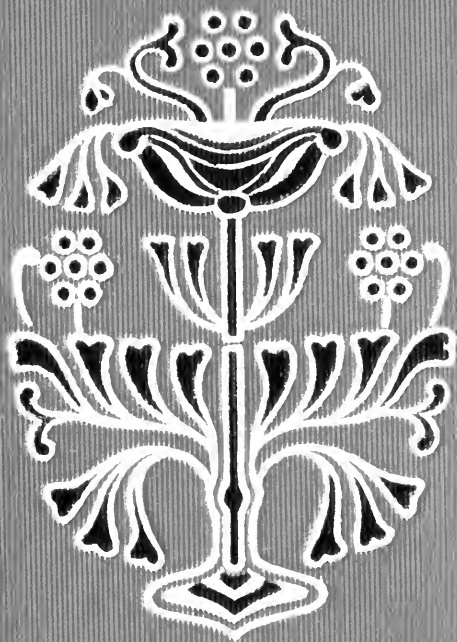


*He and
Hecuba*



*Baroness
Von Hutten*

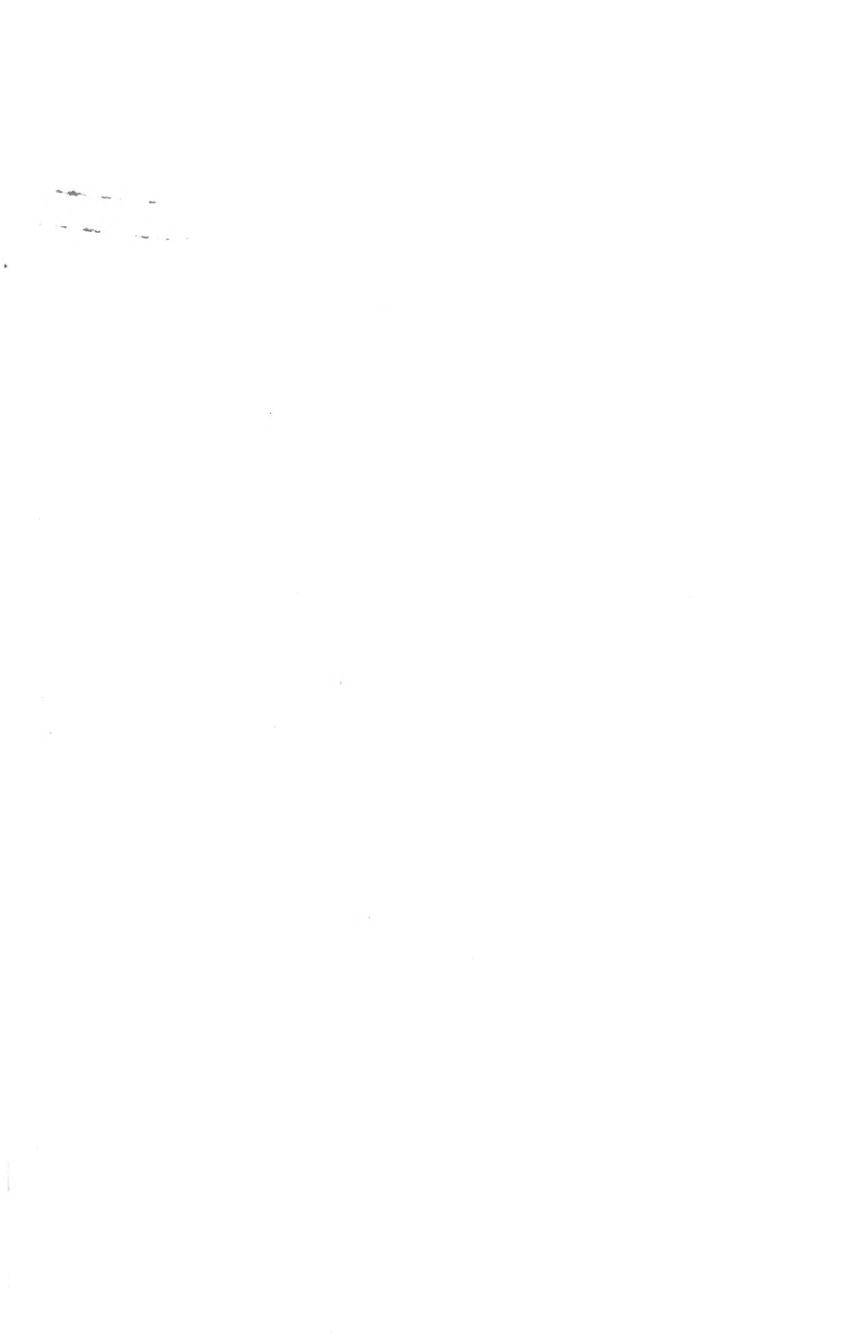
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HE AND HECUBA

HE AND HECUBA

A NOVEL

BY

BARONESS VON HUTTEN

AUTHOR OF MARR'D IN MAKING, OUR LADY OF THE BEECHES
VIOLETT, ETC.



NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1905

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Published, October, 1905

TO
HENRY JAMES, Esq.
WHOSE KINDLY CRITICISM
OF THE
SHORT STORY OF THE SAME NAME
ENCOURAGED ME TO LENGTHEN IT TO ITS
PRESENT FORM,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
ON THE
PRINCIPLE THAT
A CAT MAY LOOK AT A KING

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HE AND HECUBA

CHAPTER I

THE Earl of Yarrow leaned back in his low chair, his delicate hands crossed on the rug that covered his knees, his quiet brown eyes fixed on the smouldering fire.

Behind him a great window glimmered faintly against the evening sky, and beyond, seen between two fantastically clipped yews, stretched the sea. Yarrow could see the chill evening scene by raising his eyes to the old gold-framed mirror, and the contrast between the two pictures before him gave him a delicious feeling of lazy well-being. Before the fire Lady Yarrow sat sewing, and opposite her, rather huddled in his chair, one thin leg crossed over the other, was the Rector, Mr. Dudley, the light of a red light falling on his beautiful old white head.

“ And this most beautiful person was discovered in Biarritz? ” the old man asked after a comfortable silence. “ Do you know anything about her? ”

“ Only that she is the most beautiful person, ” returned Lady Yarrow, her smooth, dark head bent over her work; “ that wretch to your left fell so violently in

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love with her at first sight that I was forced to make friends with her to save a scandal! ”

“ Borrow, Borrow! This is really alarming. I wonder what Rebecca will say! ”

Lord Yarrow, who was still called Borrowdaile, his former name, in the very frequent absent-minded moments of his uncle, laughed.

“ I think I could make a pretty good guess. Now, mind, don't you get me into trouble in that quarter! You yourself will be crazy about Madame Perez, but ' Aunt Rebecca '—! And she is, as well as being splendidly beautiful, most good-natured and simple, and has been particularly kind about posing to me; hasn't she, Mary? ”

“ Indeed she has. She is a great boon to him, Uncle Charles, and—a hint for Mrs. Dudley—she gave up going to no less a person than the Duchess of Berwick in order to come home with us! ”

“ Did she, indeed! Well, I am glad of that—on Rebecca's account. I am afraid I must be going, however,” the little old man nodded, looking at his watch; “ it is growing late, and you know how long it takes me to dress; I am so clumsy.”

“ You clumsy! ” Mary Yarrow repeated, indignantly, with the instant partisanship any quotation from the redoubtable Mrs. Dudley never failed to rouse in her. “ Well, that is too much! ”

Both men laughed as Mr. Dudley rose. “ Am I not allowed to abuse myself? Mary, dear, I must trot along—and your beauty will still be beautiful to-morrow ”—

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he broke off at the sound of trailing skirts in the corridor; and as the door opened Lady Yarrow reached out and turned a flood of electric light on the new comer.

“ Madame Perez—our uncle, Mr. Dudley! ”

The Rector’s blue eyes danced with delight as he gazed at the most magnificent creature he had ever beheld, and Lord Yarrow, after a short pause, said teasingly, “ Well, Uncle Charles—did I tell the truth? ”

“ No, Borrow, you did not! For the excellent reason that no words could! ”

Madame Perez laughed good-naturedly with frank comprehension of his words, and sat down in a low chair, her brown velvet skirts billowing about her in graceful waves.

She was really extraordinarily lovely with her great masses of wonderful gold-bronze hair, the darkness of her shadowy eyes, and the redness of her perfect, rather small mouth.

Added to the charm of her beauty, she possessed the strong attraction of absolute simplicity of manner, and as she warmed her hands at the fire and chatted with Lord Yarrow, the Rector watched her with a naïve expression of rapturous delight.

“ You will find us very quiet,” the old man said at length, “ and all of us but your host and hostess, very dull. Borrowdaile has a great many good points, but I must confess to its being very dull, and you, I fear——”

Madame Perez laughed, as Lady Yarrow rang for tea. “ Oh, no, I too am very dull. I am a big, sleepy, stupid woman.”

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“ Uncle Charles doesn’t believe you. Look at his face,” put in Lady Yarrow. “ She likes to say she is stupid, Uncle Charles. She *ought* to be, you know, if there were such a thing as fair play in the world—but she isn’t. I’m not saying she isn’t *lazy*! ”

It was at this juncture, as Madame Perez, who faced the door, was smiling in deprecation at the Rector, that the door opened a second time, and a second clergyman came in, with the air, in spite of a certain harshness in his face, of one at home in the house, and glad to enter there where a place awaited him.

Mary gave him her hand, he bent over Yarrow, and then, greeting the Rector with a sudden softening in his dark face, turned to Madame Perez, to whom Mary Yarrow introduced him.

King Hardy was at that time forty-two years old, but his face, with its grim frown, and deep-cut lines about the mouth, looked older.

His eyes, deepset under their heavy, overhanging brow, were of a bright light gray that contrasted oddly, almost unpleasantly, with his dark, weather-beaten skin. He wore a thick moustache, one-half of which was very gray, the other being almost quite black, as was the rough short-cropped hair, growing rather low on his brow.

Rosalba Perez summed the man up as plain, elderly, and uninteresting. Then, as he began to talk, in a rather musical voice, and his face broke into a smile at some remark of the Rector’s, she modified her first opinion, and set him down as plain, elderly and interesting.

After a few commonplaces, Hardy announced the ob-

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jeet of his visit. A man in the neighborhood, a mason, had fallen that afternoon and broken both his legs. "I carried him home and fetched the doctor," he explained, "but it's going to cost a lot of money to cure him, and—I can't do it. So you may, George."

He ended abruptly, and bending forward, pushed a protruding log back into the fire.

"Thanks. You say you carried him home," Yarrow answered. "You mean to his house?"

Hardy turned, with a little half-defiant laugh. "No. I mean to *my* house. I have an extra room there, and I can look after the poor chap. I know something of nursing, you know."

"*I* know," said Dr. Dudley, suddenly, "a great many things, King." With a little, almost womanly gesture, he laid his hand on Hardy's arm, where it trembled slightly until the younger man, covering it with his, said: "All vanity, sir. No man knows so much as he thinks. Lady Yarrow, you have given me cream, which I hate."

Lady Yarrow changed the cup, and the subject, and Madame Perez wondered what it was all about.

A few minutes later, Hardy rose, and helping Yarrow out of his chair said good-bye to the others, and left the room with his host leaning on his arm. "Highway robbery introduced into the drawing-room," observed the Rector. "He will get no end of money out of Yarrow, Mary."

"Yes," answered Mary, very gently.

Madame Perez watched her meditatively for a few

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seconds, and then said: "Is he also a—Révérénd? And what curious manners he has!"

Lady Yarrow nodded. "Yes. He is Rector of Carbury, the village through which you came on your way from the station. He is rather—gruff—but the best man in the world. Isn't he, Uncle Charles?"

Mr. Dudley smiled. "He is a very good man, and does more good in a week than most of us in a year. I love King Hardy."

Madame Perez shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"I always salute goodness—when I am shown it—but I cannot say I find this particular good man very—how does one say—*simpatico*?"

Mary laughed.

"Vain woman. You mean, that you and your beauty were not noticed by him! Ah yes—I too was once used to a certain amount of admiration, and Mr. Hardy, I am sure, does not know that I am not as hideous as the Witch of Endor."

"The Witch of Endor, my dear, was probably a young and handsome woman," remarked the Rector, "for she is supposed to have done much mischief——"

"At all events, Mr. Hardy certainly is as blind as a bat, or he wouldn't have sat for half an hour opposite Madame Perez, without looking at her!"

Out in the chill November air, the man who had sat for half an hour opposite Madame Perez without looking at her, was hurrying homewards, his trousers turned up over his coarse boots, his hat jammed down over his eyes.

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He had a roll of bank notes in his pocket, the memory of Yarrow's sympathy should have been vividly in his mind, and was in reality somewhere in the back part of his consciousness, but the man's memory had carried him back many years into his youth. On he hurried, splashing unheeding through the mud, responding half-unconsciously to the curt greetings of the few people he met. He did not see the lighted windows of the village through which he passed; he did not look with a kindly smile into the occasionally open cottage doors, where the fleeting pictures of humble comfort usually pleased him; he did not pause at the solitary cottage half-way between the village and his Rectory, where a sick boy lay, expecting a cheery word from him.

He was deep in one of the terrible memories that were the bane of his life, and knowing his weakness as he knew his strength, made not the slightest effort to fight against what he called his demon.

He saw, instead of the steep, dark country road and flat gray fields about him, a yellow-white terrace, on the balustrade of which climbed giant heliotrope and small, shaggy roses.

Overhead, instead of the low-hanging dark sky, a vivid, starlit vault, streaked from time to time with a falling star.

Instead of the smell of wet mud, and rain-soaked, half-bare hedgerows, his nostrils inflated to catch the odors of a thousand heavy-scented flowers. Instead of being King Hardy, Rector of Carbury, a middle-aged, hard-working man, he was King Hardy, nephew of Mr.

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Hardy of Bishop's Hardy, twenty-five years old, traveling in Italy for his pleasure.

The hurrying man took off his hat and wiped his brow with his handkerchief as he spoke the words aloud.

There she sat in the long chair beside him. He had called her many names, his treasure, his soul. Low-browed, dark-eyed, with white teeth and a voice that made his heart tremble——

On and on he went, his thoughts as well as his feet faster and faster as the house on the hill grew larger and more distinct.

He remembered the lace that edged her yellow gown *that night*. He remembered the rose he put in her hair—but he had reached his gate, and there was no more time now.

Later, when he was alone in his study, the demon would come back, he knew. And the immediate cause for the visit of the demon was the tawny-haired woman in the loose velvet gown at Borrowdaile House.

There was no particular resemblance, he knew, but it was the type—good-bye, then, until later.

Pausing a minute outside, and drawing a deep breath, Hardy opened his house-door and went in.

CHAPTER II

THE corridor was unlighted, and the Rector, stumbling on a chair, nearly fell. His study door was half open, and he limped into the small room in which the remnants of an untidy fire glowed faintly, showing up with a curious distinctness the shabby discomfort of the torn rug, the faded green rep furniture, and the broken-shaded lamp on the table.

He fumbled for matches, but there were none in their place, so going to the door he called in a very gentle voice, "Katie!"

An invisible door opened somewhere to his right, and with a strong smell of frying meat, came the answer.

"Light my lamp, please; I have no matches."

"I've got my meat in the pan, Mr. Hardy, and I can't leave it. I'm sorry, but I can't do everything at once. MacDougall was playing jackstraws with the matches; they must be somewhere around."

Hardy went back and lighting a bit of paper in the red ashes, used it as a torch until he found the matches, and lighted the lamp himself.

He had not reproved the servant for her way of speaking to him, for she was a hard-working soul whose good qualities he appreciated, and he worked patiently,

closing the shutters and mending the fire, but as the light grew stronger it showed a frown on his face that indicated a bitter sense of disgust and unavailing anger kept down by his whole will.

On the sofa lay a child of four years old, asleep, with its mouth open, its arm hanging to the floor. On the one arm-chair lay a half-empty nursing bottle, the long brown tube dropping slow drops of milk to the rug, where they had formed a small puddle. Hardy picked it up, set it on the chimney-piece, and then, still frowning, bent and gently wiped the sleeping child's little nose on his own handkerchief. "God help me!" he said, half aloud, as he turned, and took off his coat, his collar and his cuffs.

These carefully folded away in a drawer, he drew on a shabby dressing-gown, one sleeve of which was smeared with some sticky substance; it was jam. Bending to the lamp he scraped it off with a paper knife, and then going to the kitchen, rubbed it with a damp towel.

Katie stood by the stove, her head tied up, frying the chops, the smoke of which hung about her in clouds.

"'d'you find the matches, Mr. Hardy?" she asked.

"Yes, Katie. I see you have toothache again. I am sorry. I'd have it out if I were you."

The girl shook her head. "I'm afraid to. Oh—there's MacDougall waked up. He'll wake the baby, he's yelling so."

Hardy hurried back to his study to find the child, its fat face seamed and crimson with sleep, sitting up, and calling loudly for its bottle.

"Be *still*, MacDougall, I'll fetch your milk. Be a

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good boy, and don't wake Baby and Little Baby." He was conscious of his weakness towards his children, but there was no middle way for him. On days such as this, when he had a feeling very like hatred towards all his surroundings, his only refuge was in this great gentleness that deluded every one, and nearly killed himself in its accomplishment.

As he came back from the kitchen again, this time with the bottle filled with milk, his wife came slowly downstairs, a baby of a little more than a year in her arms.

She wore a loose drab dressing-gown of some sort, and her slippers clacked as she walked.

"Dear me, King, what is the matter with MacDougall?" she began, fretfully, following him into the study. "He woke Anabel, and I'm just worn out. Harold was so fretful all day."

"I'm very sorry, Abby, my poor girl. Be *still*, MacDougall. What's wrong with Harold?"

"Stomach-ache, I suppose," she returned, sinking down into a chair as MacDougall subsided into quiet, hugging the precious bottle to his breast. "I never *saw* such children as ours for stomach-ache. I'm sure they haven't it from *my* side. None of us ever had it as far back as I can remember."

Hardy laughed harshly. "Then it must be an inheritance from the Hardys. Isn't MacDougall too old to have a bottle, Abby?"

She did not notice his little outburst; it was a very little one, and she was not observant.

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“Of course he’s too big,” she answered; “he’s a naughty boy, and a black man will fetch him if he doesn’t learn to eat nicely with a spoon.”

Before the indignant MacDougall could protest, Katie, who had been in the opposite room, setting the table, announced that dinner was ready, and the little baby being luckily asleep again, and laid in a safe position on the sofa, the rest of the family grouped itself around the table. Hardy closed his eyes and asked the blessing, and the meal began. The soup was cold and greasy; the chops burnt outside, raw within; the potatoes soggy and uncooked.

Hardy partook of everything, grimly, doggedly, without knowing what he ate. Two of the elder boys had been quarreling, and one of them had a swollen nose.

“Didn’t I just knock you out with one finger!” said the other, sucking up his soup noisily.

“You lie, you beast. You used your beastly boots, and that’s cheating.”

“Be silent, Eustace,” interrupted the father. “Anna, scrape that sauce off your bib. Katie, a fresh bib to-morrow for Anna. Abby, try to eat another chop, my dear——”

At length it was over, the children had said good night to their father, the elder ones shaking hands with him, the younger bestowing on him kisses which he returned with a “God bless you.” Then he locked the study door and sat down at his table.

Katie, in the kitchen, had a visitor, a young butcher from Borrowdaile.

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“ I seen him a-pounding up that there lane this evening, but ’e didn’t see me. He’s a rum ’un, your master.”

Katie tossed her head. “ He’s a very good master, and a very good man, too, Mr. Ibbetts. He has enough to worry most men an’ make ’em as cross as Sancho, but ’e’s *never* cross. Like a lamb, ’e is—which you can’t be expected to reckonize, your last lamb being an old ram, Mr. Ibbetts! ”

Mr. Ibbetts was not impervious to sarcasm, and went on to explain that he meant no ’arm, not ’e, and that so far as ’e knew, Mr. ’Ardy was an angel.

“ He’s as kind as kind can be, every one knows that,” he added, “ but ’e’s queer and absent-minded at times. Like enough planning one of his good deeds.”

This recalled the injured mason to Katie’s mind, and knocking at the study door, she reminded her master of his presence and probable need of help. Hardy groaned, as the girl went back to the kitchen, and then falling to his knees he prayed in silence for a few minutes before going, humbled and sad, to his neglected guest.

The man lay on his back, his head buried uncomfortably in the soft pillow, his face, seen by the light Hardy brought with him, distorted with pain and impatience.

“ If you’d ’ave let me go home to my wife I wouldn’t ’ave been forgot like this,” he began as Hardy raised his head and rearranged the pillow. “ All very well to ’ave nothing but milk, but it’s ’ard on a man not to ’ave even the milk.”

“ I know, Briggs, I know,” answered Hardy, humbly. “ I *did* forget, and I beg your pardon. The milk

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is coming, and the doctor will be here in a few minutes."

"Begging pardon don't do much good, when a man's got such pains in 'is legs as I have. That's wot comes of letting other folks meddle with your private affairs. I didn't want to come 'ere, you can't deny that. You may ha' meant kindly, I'm not saying no to that, Mr. 'Ardy, but as far as comfort goes, I'd ha' been better off at 'ome, with the old woman to look after me."

Hardy sat by him in silence, his head on one hand, and received the rough blows, which grew worse as the milk did not come, without protest.

It was the old story. He had meant kindly in bringing the man here, and then, forgetting him, had done more harm than good, and was filled with shame.

He had sat there in his study, given up completely to the torturing joys of dreaming of the old days when he had sinned and been splendidly happy, while up here in the dingy, dark room, his suffering guest lay neglected. The light from the lamp fell on his bowed head, showing the coarse white hairs that were strewn sparsely among the dark locks; the square low brow seamed with two deep lines, and now drawn with remorse and pain; the deep eye sockets, the short straight nose, and the moustache so heavy that the mouth, when in repose, was completely hidden.

The feverish, homesick, coarse-grained man in the bed talked on, growing rougher and more cruel as time passed, but Hardy, his jaw set grimly, one hand clenched in the shadow, did not answer.

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When the milk came, he gave a little to his patient, and as he set down the cup, a ring at the house-door echoed up the narrow stairs and caught his ear. Telling Katie to sit with Briggs for a minute, Hardy ran softly down and, opening the door, admitted the doctor.

“ Good evening, Tench, I am glad you have come,” he said, shaking hands with the little man in the long coat. “ He’s suffering a good deal, poor fellow.”

“ Ugh. Homesiek, too, I’ll be bound? ”

Hardy nodded. “ Yes. Perhaps I was wrong, I often am. You know the way, and if you’ll go up I’ll mend the fire here and get out some whisky for you. Tench,”—he added as the doctor started upstairs—“ just step a little softly, will you, like a good fellow. My wife—my wife doesn’t like my bringing people in, you know, and she was out this afternoon, so I haven’t mentioned it to her.”

Tench nodded and tiptoed his way past the door behind which he could picture the helpless helpmate of his friend sitting in dreary idleness.

Katie, having overheard some of the sick man’s remarks, seized the opportunity of being alone with him to give him a severe scolding. Tench found the two enjoying a battle that had brought a bright color to the cheeks of his patient and a too-great heat to his big hands.

After sending the loyal and sharp-tongued woman out of the room, and examining Briggs, the little doctor went downstairs, rubbing one ear thoughtfully.

“ He’s going to have a bad night I fear, Hardy. That she-devil of yours has been pitching into him and work-

ing him into a fever—Katie, I mean,” he added hastily, as Hardy looked up aghast, “and he’s restless and homesick. I’ll write out a prescription for him, and if you’ll let Katie go down with me I’ll go to Woolley, and have him make it up—it’s a quieting draught.”

He drank his whisky standing, and then drew on his coat, that Hardy had hung by the kitchen stove to dry, and was now steaming and spongy.

“Call the girl, will you?”

Hardy hesitated. “If you’ll have the prescription made out, Tench, I’ll see that it’s fetched in half an hour.”

“Very well. Good night.” The doctor growled inarticulately to himself as he went down the slippery garden path. He knew perfectly well that Hardy would fetch the medicine himself, but he did not dare remonstrate. The Rector, left alone, looked the house, sent Katie to bed with a poultice of his own making on her aching cheek, and then, after a final look at Briggs, who had fallen into a restless sleep, went out into the rainy darkness. At the garden gate he came on a woman standing looking up at the house. It was Mrs. Briggs, a scold and an inciter to rebellion, an avowed enemy to all parsons, and an unavowed but well-known friend to the bottle. “It’s my man,” she began at once. “I was wondering ’ow ’e is. I ain’t a-doing no ’arm.”

Hardy paused a minute. She was horribly antipathetic to him, and he dreaded the tale her tongue would tell of his household circumstances, but she was Briggs’s wife, and she was not drunk.

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“ Perhaps,” he said, gently, reopening the gate, “ you would like to see him, Mrs. Briggs? Or even to— to spend the night with him? I can’t give you a bed, but I can give you a mattress——”

The woman accepted his offer eagerly, curiosity as to the interior of the Rectory mingling with her anxiety about her husband. Hardy went back with her, showed her the way upstairs, and then, leaving her sitting by the sick man, once more went out.

He came back, the medicine in his pocket, aching with the effort he had been making for hours, and tired to death, but an hour later, when the clock struck half-past twelve, he lay down, dressed, on the broken-sprunged sofa in his study. He had given his mattress to the woman upstairs.

CHAPTER III

A WEEK late, Lady Yarrow, coming in from a walk, was met at the house-door by her guest, who told her, between the puffs of a cigarette, that she, Madame Perez, had rented the Liscom place, and meant to pass the winter there.

Mary looked into the lazy eyes with surprise. "Liscom House! But why, if you can stand it here, don't you stay with us? Yarrow will be broken-hearted!"

"But you won't. Ah, I know that you don't like me, and believe me, I am not in the least offended. You are far too good to offend. If I were here, always *dans votre chemin*, you would soon hate me, and I should be sorry for that! For you see, I like you hugely—one says 'hugely'?"

Lady Yarrow laughed. "One says 'hugely' on occasion. Come and tell me more about your plans, and don't imagine that I don't like you, for I do, indeed."

Tall and graceful she led the way upstairs, into her morning-room, and when the maid had left them, the two women sat down and smiled expectantly at each other. Madame Perez spoke first, slowly, weighing her words a little, as she leaned back in her chair.

"Dear Lady Yarrow, 'liking' is such an elastic word, isn't it? In English, I mean. One likes one's

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tailor because he makes good skirts; one likes one's maid because she understands hair and lace, and—one likes one's friends—sometimes. Loving of course is different. One can love with all one's strength without being loved in return, whereas of all the people I have ever known, I am my own self the only one who can *like* unreturned. How did we get to this point? I began with telling you about Liscom House— Well, I like you very much, and you do not like me at all. Or rather, you like me through your husband's pleasure in my beauty."

She paused, and Mary, quite taken aback by the outburst of discerning frankness, answered in kind, as best she could.

"I protest. You and I have little in common. Nothing, I might say, and therefore we could never really be friends, but, so long as you insist on talking about it, I have not yet seen in you anything that I dislike."

The other woman laughed. "Voilà! 'not yet,' you say. You are like a traveler in a dark night who knows that when he *can* see he will see—bones and things. You understand? Now I know that you will never let me know you, but that if I did I should see only things I admire and respect. And this is why I am staying on in the neighborhood. I like it all so much. I like the sea, and—believe this—I like giving Lord Yarrow the pleasure of painting me."

There was a certain simplicity in the way she uttered the last words that touched Lady Yarrow.

"Thanks. I do believe you, and I am very grateful to you for your patience. Another thing, Madame Perez

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—I can not tell you how much I admire your lack of vanity.”

Madame Perez laughed a little. “ No, I am not vain. Perhaps because most people bore me, and—I don’t care what they think. *Enfin*,—it is not to my credit. One is born either vain or not vain! ”

“ A very fatalistic view,” returned Lady Yarrow, poking the fire gently.

“ Fatalistic? Yes, I am that. Most Catholics are, though they do not know it. But consider. Men see me and say, ‘ My God, what a beauty,’ and then they bore me and I bore them in return, and they go away. It is so simple! However, I like some people very much. You will understand me when I say that I more than like Lord Yarrow. I love him, and he shall paint me until one days he says, ‘ Madame Perez, I have enough. Go away.’ And your old uncle with the face of an angel with human eyes. Him I love, too. I don’t love you. A woman never loves another woman unless it be of her family, born in her blood, but just to see you, and hear you sing ‘ *O wüsst ich nur*,’ I am staying. In your house, no, with all thanks for your goodness to me, but near you, where I can see you as much as you can support.”

In all the six months she had known Madame Perez, Mary Yarrow had not heard her talk as much as in that half-hour in the little chintz-hung room; and never, in spite of the disquieting, unsolicited personality of her remarks, had the Englishwoman been so near liking the other, who had so unexpectedly understood her and the nature of her feelings.

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“ You are a very extraordinary person,” she said after a short pause, “ and you embarrass me, but I appreciate the kindness to my husband, which is also a kindness to me, and I hope you will not repent having decided to take the house. It is a charming house, by the way, and I hope to see you often in it, as well as here, where you will always be welcome.”

Madame Perez rose. “ Thank you. You are now going to Lord Yarrow and I to take a walk. To-night you will sing me the Brahms song.”

She walked slowly to her room, trailing her skirts, which always seemed longer and more graceful than the skirts of other women, her head bent, her hands clasped behind her. Half an hour later she was going up the long avenue of the house she had rented for a year, a big key in her muff.

It was about three o'clock, and a yellow, lifeless sun cast shadows on the frozen grass, which was already silvered in sheltered places.

The air was chill ; it was going to be a cold night, and winter was coming.

Madame Perez paused from time to time, and looked about her with the bright eyes of one gazing on a new possession. The old trees, each one bent slightly towards the sinking sun as though bowing to it, but in reality not saluting, but humbled by their enemy the sea-wind, pleased her, and she determined to have a heating apparatus put in the little Greek temple at the top of the slope behind the evergreen hedge.

“ I shall have it glassed in,” she thought, “ and

warm, with red cushions and an open fire—and I shall sit there when it is very cold and snowy, and be warm, and comfortable, and alone.”

The house, a rather neglected building of Queen Anne’s time, stood at the top of the gradual slope, and its red walls, still festooned with shabby patches of creepers, seemed to have drawn into itself all the warmth and comfort of the scene.

Madame Perez stood still for a few minutes, looking at it with new eyes. The last time she had seen it it had been potentially, now it was actually, hers. “I shall live here,” she said, aloud, “and be happy, and ill possibly,—and even, possibly, suffer here.” Then she started, for King Hardy stood beside her, and he had heard.

“You are trespassing, Monsieur,” she began, laughing, and holding out her hand, the key in it, to him. “The house is mine, and the ox and the ass—it is all mine.”

Hardy shook hands with her and stood with bare head. “You have bought it?”

“No. But I have rented it, and I am going to live here for a year. As I was telling myself, I am going, in this house, to be happy, unhappy, give dinners, have headaches—possibly even die here. Can you not imagine my coffin being jolted down the steps there, and the neighbors standing around trying to look sorry?”

“I hope you will be happy,” he returned, a little absently. “It is cold, is it not?”

They had met once since that first time at Borrowdaile, at a dinner at the Dudley’s, but had not found that sym-

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pathy that goes to making friendly acquaintance. Hardy had indeed avoided her, as having been the indirect cause of one of the worst mental debauches, as he savagely called them, that he had had for months.

The man shivered in his thin overcoat, while she, warm and rosy in her sables, smiled politely and waited for him to take his leave.

Suddenly he said, as he picked up the key that she had let fall, and holding it in his hand, "If you are going to live here for a year, Madame—Perez, you will be my parishioner."

"Yours? No, I am a Catholic, and besides, I thought this house was in Mr. Dudley's parish?"

"No. Liscom is just within my bounds. We are very poor, we of Carbury, and for two years have had no one to help us, except Lord Yarrow, who is my friend. I warn you, I am very bold about begging, and shall beg of you, although you are a Catholic!"

She looked at him thoughtfully. "I can fancy that you are bold. Well, I will help you, Mr. Hardy. That is, I will give you money. I will not help trim the church, nor visit the poor. I hate the poor near me. I mean in England. Of course the poor of southern countries are to be envied rather than pitied." Hardy did not care in the least for her opinion as to the poor of southern countries.

"Then you will? Thank you a thousand times. If you knew how I have been dreading the winter for them."

"Let me know what you need. There is no Catholic

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church here, and I like English sermons. You won't mind my going to Mr. Dudley's church? "

He held out his hand. " Not at all, not at all. My church is not for women like you, and you will be in better hands than mine at Borrowdaile, God knows."

She watched him as he walked quickly down the avenue, his square head thrown back, still uncovered in his excitement. He walked very well, and she decided that she liked him, his zeal for his people reminding her of certain missionary priests in the old days in Chili.

Still thinking of Padre Ignacio, she opened the door of the house and was about to go in, when footsteps caused her to turn, and she saw Hardy again.

" I am very idiotic, Madame Perez," he said, joining her, " not to have realized at once that you mustn't go through this empty house alone. Allow me to accompany you."

" There is no danger; I am not afraid."

" You may not be afraid, but the house has been empty for two years. Do you wish to go upstairs first? "

Surprised, she allowed him to lead the way, opening windows, unlocking doors, and showing her short cuts through the rooms that she had not seen before.

" It was one of the pleasantest houses in the country," he said once. " It will be good for Carbury to have it inhabited again."

They went in silence down the echoing stairs, and into the evening. The sun had disappeared behind a curtain of dull gray clouds; it was very cold.

Madame Perez shivered and turned up her fur collar.

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“ One could not live in England without furs. The cold here gets into one’s very bones.”

Hardy looked at her with a rather grim smile. He knew what cold in one’s very bones means, but he did not try to tell her. He was happier than he had been for days; a publishing house in London to which he had written, had promised to read his book on the Apostolic Succession, and somehow he was hopeful of its being accepted this time; Briggs was better, and Hardy had, by a series of self-inflicted penances, at length found it possible to forgive himself his weakness of a week ago, and his forgetfulness of the poor man. Now this new parishioner had come, with both hands full of money, and money was what he needed. The proudest man in the world as regarded his own affairs, so sensitive about his poverty as to have alienated several good friends by his ferocity when even the subtlest offer of help was made, or even when none such had been made, and his own sore imagination was at fault, he was, in the matter of his poor people, determinedly and often troublesomely persistent in begging.

“ I give all I can, and you may help me out,” he had often said, as if conferring a privilege, and in those cases, not infrequent, when the privilege was roundly denied, and declared a nuisance, he was not to be shaken off, and went on making his appeals without the slightest sense of shame.

Madame Perez, he saw, was a very rich woman, whose carelessness in money matters he would scrupulously use for the good of his poor.

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And Madame Perez, walking through the chill dark with him, was thinking of good old Padre Ignacio, years ago, when she was a fat-legged little girl with hanging curls and a vivid interest in her own sins as a matter of confession.

They closed the heavy gates that she had opened alone, and, still in silence, went through the muddy village streets.

There is something in the homely comfort of evening, in winter; in the splashes of light as cottage doors open and close; in the steady glow from small uncurtained windows, that appeals to the imagination, and Hardy turned up the collar of his shabby coat with a little thrill of pleasure in thinking that he would soon be at least warm. There was also to be beefsteak pudding for dinner, and a beefsteak pudding was one of his pet dishes, and one of Katie's strong points.

At length they reached the little south gate of Borrowdaile House, and he paused. "Good night, Madame Perez. Thank you very much for your promise to help my people. And I hope you may indeed be happy at Liscom."

He held out his hand, and she put hers, warm from her muff, into it. "*Chi vivrà verrà*," she answered, lightly.

Hardy started back as if stung, and to her surprise, stumbled away without speaking. His peace was gone; "who lives will see,"—it was *she* who had said it with a little shrug, a thousand times to him.

With a dull groan he turned towards home; it was

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not that he loved the woman he had loved long ago; he had seen her once since, grown thin, yellow, and hard-eyed—and his heart had not stirred. It was that the memory of his youth and his sin brought back to him, with all the force of the memory of a man with a strong imagination, the very feeling of his lost youth and happiness. It was an unavailing, involuntary, painful effort to go back into the times when “*les lauriers n’étaient pas encore coupés.*”

He plodded up the steep road, his head bent, the lines in his face, could they have been seen, relaxed into a sort of hopeless sadness.

His laurels were cut long ago; yet the scent of them persisted in torturing his nostrils.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. DUDLEY was one of those women who, when their sons marry, should, instead of "old Mrs. So-and-So," be called "Mary, Mrs. So-and-So," as one sees written of dowagers higher in the social scale, "Mary, Lady So-and-So." Charles Dudley had often said that he felt himself to be very deficient in not giving a title to his wife, and when his only son, also Charles, married, the elder man had gravely apologized to his wife for his inability to offer her at least the official title of "Rebecca, Mrs. Dudley." Mrs. Dudley was a very imposing woman, with one of those paralyzing faces in the presence of a joke that have at one time rebuked and impressed most of us. Who has not felt ashamed of understanding a silly pleasantry evidently uncomprehended by some one who looks on with cold eyes? Without being icily regular, her features were to a great extent null, and her face presented that inharmonious expression given by youthful hair above a time-worn complexion.

However, she was a good and conscientious woman, and according to her nature, a good wife.

In earlier days, when young Charles was a baby, Charles the Elder had confided to his friend and cousin, the then Earl of Yarrow, his surprise at his wife's moth-

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erhood. “ To see her, you know, holding the poor little beggar on her knee and looking at it as though she rather liked it and wondered where the dickens it came from—it is wonderful, Yarrow! ”

The young Charles had thrived, however, and grown to be surprisingly like his mother.

Dudley used to watch the little fellow’s solemn efforts at play, his cold reception of the stories of Red Riding Hood, Jack o’ the Beanstalk and other heroes, his tranquil acceptance of aprons as a means of saving his clothes, with a wonder not unmingled with sadness. The night of the day when the news came of the exemplary youth’s marriage with a music hall song-and-dance artist, his father wrote to Lord Yarrow, then at his place in the next county :

“ It is deplorable, shocking, and humiliating for the family. I dare say Rebecca is prostrated, and I hope that you, as a relative, will also feel the shock, but for my part, George, I confess it is the first act of the poor lad’s life that has ever given me real pleasure, and hope for him, at once. The thought of his having the character to marry at six-and-twenty, and knowing, as he certainly must, something of the world, a girl from the stage—that he had the courage to risk his mother’s anger, and the inevitable trouble his act will bring him, shows me that there is more in the lad than I had thought. The girl is young, pretty, and he must love her, so perhaps she’ll make a man of him, as he will, I trust, make a fitting wife for a gentleman, out of her.”

Lord Yarrow, delighted with the very characteristic

letter, showed it to his new daughter-in-law, Mary Borrowdaile, and she declared herself to be wildly in love with the writer, whom she had never seen. When the Borrowdailes came to Borrowdaile to live, and the young woman learned to know her new old uncle, as Dudley called himself, the falling in love proved mutual and the Rector confided in her the pleasure he derived from his semi-occasional visits to London, where his son and daughter-in-law and the small Rosalind were living.

Once, when Charles junior had had trouble with a very dreadful person whom he was obliged to admit on certain terms of intimacy, as she was his undeniable mother-in-law, Lady Yarrow accompanied the old man on his voyage of consolation, and partly by her tact and charm, though no doubt chiefly by her position as Lady Yarrow, and her uses as a future source of comfortable boastfulness, brought the troublesome Mrs. Linker to reason and humbleness, to the content of every one.

The Rector loved Mary Yarrow dearly, and she was much more deeply versed in the woes of the neighborhood than the masterful Mrs. Dudley suspected or would have approved.

The old man had held in his arms and christened the poor little Lord Borrowdaile, who lived only a few days, and of whom no one ever spoke; he had been told a story of which only Yarrow, a man no longer in England, another man, and an old lady in the next county knew the truth; once, when a story about the falling and ruin of a new bridge somewhere in Argentine had appeared in the paper with a list of dead and wounded added, Lady Yar-

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row had sent for him and he had passed hours watching her walking up and down the room with close-wrung hands and white lips; after which he had dined with her and Yarrow, who knew nothing of the story in the Telegraph, and was that evening greatly interested in a barrel of new old china come down from London, which the three unpacked and admired after dinner. That was over four years ago, and had never been mentioned since, but neither of the two friends had forgotten it, nor the day when a revised list of the killed in the accident was published, and Lady Yarrow sent the Rector a clipping, under which she had written "Thank God."

Four years was as a day to the old man, but he had not forgotten his youth, and realized with thankfulness the length, to a young and healthy woman, of the 1,461 days.

Lord Yarrow, who had for years been an invalid, at his best in a long chair, greatly encouraged the friendship of his uncle and his wife, and watched the two with the kindest of smiles in his eyes. His uncle was perfect, and his wife better than perfect to those eyes, so what wonder that they reflected love and gentleness as they rested on the old man and the young woman.

One morning late in November, Mary Yarrow came into her husband's study, dressed for a walk. Half unsciously she had, since her close association with Madame Perez, adopted a strikingly simple mode of dress, and to-day, in her close brown gown and small toque, looked, Yarrow thought, more stately and high-bred than ever.

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“ Where is the tailor-made lady going? ” he asked, as she took his hot hand in hers and stood looking down at him. She had never been drawn towards the sick as a class, but as her affection for her husband grew, her sensibility to every slightest variation in his condition increased so that she, not he, was like a barometer registering his every change; and his every change must be, they both knew, ultimately for the worst.

“ What is it? ” he asked, gently, seeing in her eyes the stab at her heart. “ Do I look ill? I slept well, dearest.”

“ Oh, Borrow, Borrow, I *do* love you! ” she cried, dropping to her knees and gathering the hand she held to her breast.

“ I know. You have made me the happiest man in the world for five years, and sometimes I feel as though I were good for five years more.”

He spoke very gently, with the gentleness he always had when thinking of the time just before they married. He knew the whole story, she having told him herself, and its existence had never been ignored by either of them. Slowly she rose.

“ I am going to see Uncle Charles, Borrow,” she said, with a change of tone that answered not his words but that was in his voice. “ We are going to plot about the Hardys. Something *must* be done, and he is so frightfully fierce. I asked him to let me be god-mother to the last baby, and he nearly bit my head off. Now there’s another one coming, and it is going to be a hard winter, and I *know* they have hardly enough to eat.”

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“ Yes; it is very terrible, and he is wrong to be so proud with old friends. He won’t even let me tip my own god-son at Christmas. Poor King! ”

Lady Yarrow fastened her boa. “ Poor King is a mule. Uncle Charles thinks I might possibly manage *her*, but I don’t know——”

Her little burst of half-remorseful sentiment over, Lady Yarrow spoke briskly, and after calling Jarvis, her husband’s man, to arrange the easel and the lights for the forthcoming sitting, went quickly away on her errand of intrigue and mercy.

“ Rebecca, Mrs. Dudley,” was at home, and suspecting that something was afoot, insisted on Mary’s staying in the drawing-room, and sent for the Rector to come there, instead of allowing the younger woman to go at once to the study, as usual.

“ So you have taken to those *very* plain gowns, too, have you? ” Mrs. Dudley began. “ I do think them so extremely indecent. The back, you know.” Mary bit her lip.

“ Indecent is such an elastic term, as Madame Perez says, isn’t it? How shocked you would be, for instance, if one of the Apostles should suddenly come in, in his loose dressing-gown-y garment and no boots.”

“ My dear! ”

Mary wasn’t in the least dear to Mrs. Dudley, and understood that the term was used rather as an opprobrious epithet when addressed to her by that lady.

“ Yes. I sometimes—hem—meditate on such things. Oh, Uncle Charles, Mrs. Dudley says I am indecent! ”

The Rector paused in a square of sunshine from the window, his little bent figure and decidedly bowed legs drawn against it distinctly.

“ If you are indecent, my dear, then—I wish all women were indecent!”

Mrs. Dudley frowned. “ I wish you would be more careful in your speech, Charles,” she said. “ That sounds very shocking for a clergyman of the Church of God.”

“ Of *England*, my love,” protested the Rector, mildly. “ And I merely meant that I wish there were more women like Mary.”

“ Will you come for a walk with me, Uncle Charles? ” Lady Yarrow asked. It was malicious of her to call him that quite so often in the presence of the lady whom she invariably addressed as “ Mrs. Dudley.”

“ He cannot go this morning. The Rector never goes out on a Thursday morning, as he is busy with parish business.”

“ The Rector is a worm, and as such, my love, he sometimes cannot resist a turn. Come, Mary, let us take one. The sun is glorious, and we’ll go down to the cove.”

Mrs. Dudley was not hurt. She was never hurt, but she was angry, and left the room at once with much dignity and a back view that, considering the new cut of self-respecting skirts, amused Mary. But in a few minutes the old man and the young woman, walking seawards, with the strong breeze blowing their hair back over their ears, had quite forgotten the little scene, and were

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busy plotting about that most irritating and impracticable Hardy.

“ If he won’t hear reason, you’ll have to go to see her. No doubt she will prove more sensible, poor woman,” the Rector said, scrambling nimbly up a steep, stiff-frozen bank, and turning to help Mary. “ The man has no right to condemn his family to misery to save his pride. A very unrighteous sort of pride, I consider it, too. But I’ll make one more effort to make him see reason. I don’t quite like sneaking even in such a good cause.”

“ Nor do I,” she answered with vehemence. “ One can’t help respecting him, but he is cruel to his children and ruining them by indulgence at the same time. I have no patience with him.”

“ I have. I have a great deal. By Jove, Mary—there he is! Suppose I run on, beard him, and then rejoin you. He can’t kill me out of doors in broad daylight—” Mary nodded, and the old man was off, actually running over the frozen, hummocky grass.

“ Hardy! Hey, King!” she heard him call, and then she saw the younger man turn back.

Half hidden by the irregularities of the ground, she sat on a big stone and waited. The grass, silvered with frost and now eeding to the noon warmth, hung in tangles, bent and broken, curved and stiff, small drops of water hanging from some of the blades, other blades like tiny swords. Mary watched it closely; it was beautiful on its way; she wondered what wee beasts had deserted the tiny jungle at the approach of cold; on what deserted homes she was looking unknowing. Nature had

never interested her particularly, but she knew how to use her eyes, and intuitively studied anything that was put before her. When at length she heard footsteps she said, without looking up: "Well, what did he say?"

"He said," returned a voice that brought her to her feet with a start of dismay, "that he resented and would always resent any meddling in his private affairs, and that he considered such meddling from anybody—from *anybody*, Lady Yarrow—a——"

"A damned impertinence," she finished, quietly.

Hardy burst into a rough laugh. "Yes. I beg your pardon for being rude, but that I can not and will not endure. You and Mr. Dudley have no more right to interfere with my private affairs than I have to interfere in yours, and it must stop."

"Ah. I quite admit that we have no more right to be interested in your children than you would have to be in ours if—if we had any;—no more, Mr. Hardy, but as much. You are Borrow's friend, have been his friend all his life, and if—if our little boy had lived, and you had seen us neglecting him—injuring him to gratify a stupid weakness that we called our pride, would you not try to change things?" They had gone instinctively back to the road, and turned towards the village. Mary had quite forgotten Mr. Dudley.

"The cases are not analogous. I do not neglect my children," he answered, his voice hard with his effort at self-control.

"The cases *are* analogous. You may not neglect your children, but—you ill-treat them. Look at them. Are

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they what the children of a gentleman ought to be? No. You are a poor man with a large family, and you are allowing this silly, stiff-necked pride to ruin them. It is your duty to let Borrow help you. He would let you help him in a similar case."

Hardy was very white, and looked like an animal at bay.

"Good morning," he gasped, suddenly. "I can not control myself any longer," and he was off, leaving Mary rather frightened at her own daring, and yet glad that she had forced the man to hear the bald truth for once. Suddenly she laughed aloud. She had forgotten Mr. Dudley! Turning again, she went back to find him.

CHAPTER V

THAT afternoon Mrs. Hardy was sitting in a rocking-chair which would not rock, as one rocker was broken, looking out of the window.

There was little to see; the small garden, sloping steeply to the road; the gate, of which the top hinge was missing; a row of bare currant bushes; a round bed in which no flowers had been planted for over two years; beyond, the frozen road with long narrow strips of ice gleaming in the deep ruts, the village huddled at the foot of the hill.

Mrs. Hardy knew the scene by heart, and neither loved nor hated it: she simply looked at it because it was there.

In her bed in the corner the baby was asleep, and the next child, also asleep, lay on a sofa, a chair in front of it.

The carpet was worn to a colorless confusion of design, and was ragged in more than one place; the water-jug had no handle, and the basin was of another pattern. On the table near Mrs. Hardy stood a basket full of worn clothes, stringless and buttonless, but she was not sewing.

A clock downstairs struck three; but the clock on the

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chimney-piece opposite her said twenty minutes before four. Mrs. Hardy sighed patiently. There was after all no particular use in knowing the exact time. It was a blessing to have MacDougall away at Miss Tench's, and the babies both asleep.

She heard footsteps on the stair, and looked uneasily around, drawing a pair of trousers from the mending-basket and passing her hand through a great hole in the seat, a harmless deception that she hardly even hoped would deceive the new comer; King had a way of looking as if he thought things. Hardy came in, walking very softly in his coarse boots. "Both asleep? That's a treat for you, poor old girl!" he said, sitting down.

He had not been home to luncheon, and looked ill, she thought. "Where's MacDougall?"

"Miss Tench came and took him to spend the day with her. It's such a relief, King." Tears came to her eyes, and her thin lips shook.

"Of course it is a relief, Abby. Do you think I don't know what a—a hard life you have. But I can help it. You *know* I can't help it?" he added, wistfully.

"I know. Of course you can't. If I were not always so tired. You don't know what it is to be always so tired. Oh, laws!"

He winced. Ten years ago she had not said "Oh, laws." He looked pityingly at her thin hair, screwed into a tight knob; at her bony temples, at the hollows in her cheeks. Ten years ago she had been fresh, and energetic and gay. Smitten suddenly, he laid his arm about her hard shoul-

ders and kissed her tenderly. "Poor girl," he whispered, "my poor girl."

She cried unresistingly now. Cried until her nose was red and glossy, her eyes swollen. King was always so good and patient with her.

"I *know* how awful everything is," she sobbed. "I always look like the Witch of Endor, and I'm so old and hideous, and the children running wild, but I can't help it, King. I seem to be just *lamed*, somehow."

He groaned. That was it, she was lamed. She had many good qualities, and a little ordinary comfort would be to her "as rain to a flower"—but that little ordinary comfort he could not give.

Aching with remorse and anger with Lady Yarrow for putting him to this added torture, he held his wife close until she was calmer.

"If I could," he said, "God knows how happy I'd be, Abby, but I *can't*."

"Of course you can't," she returned, a little surprised, not knowing of his repeated refusals of help, and drawing his handkerchief from his pocket.

"The other day I saw the doctor's new lamp. A let-down lamp on chains, King, and it almost killed me not to be able to give you one like it."

Hardy laughed. "You dear silly little woman! What do I care about a let-down lamp on chains? I'd like to give *you* things. A man doesn't need much. I'd give you a new gown; blue, I think; blue was always your color—Hulloa, Little Baby is either going to have a convulsion, or wake up!"

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Mrs. Hardy went to the bed and in the ensuing noise, for Baby as well as Little Baby awoke too, he said good-bye and went downstairs.

Half an hour later she heard the dragging of the falling gate in its rut, and looking out, saw her husband go up the road towards an outlying hamlet where he had some sick people.

According to the two clocks, it was either about five or about six when Katie, very important and rather floury, announced to her mistress that Lady Yarrow was downstairs, and wanted very much to see Mrs. Hardy.

“Where is she, Katie?” the poor woman asked, anxiously.

“In the study, ma’am. Luckily I seen her coming, and redd up a little. The fire is burning, too.”

Mrs. Hardy put on a shawl and went down, leaving Katie in charge of the babies.

Mary stood in the middle of the room, with a good deal of color in her cheeks, her eyes bright. Her coming had been entirely unpremeditated, and was the result of her having seen as she drove homewards after a visit, the Rector of Carbury headed towards a distant village.

Mrs. Hardy greeted her with a timid cordiality tinged with surprise, and Mary was about to sit down when a loud yell from upstairs caused her hostess to start up, her hand pressed to her heart. “It is Baby,” Mrs. Hardy murmured. “You will excuse me for a minute, Lady Yarrow.”

Mary caught her by the arm. “Mrs. Hardy—I am

very fond of children—let me go up with you. I—I can say what I have to say better upstairs than here.”

“What you have to say? I—I must go, I’m afraid she has fallen off the bed.”

Mary followed without waiting for further permission, and a minute later sat in the rocking-chair with Harold, who was crying loudly out of sympathy, on her lap, while Mrs. Hardy walked up and down trying vainly to soothe the baby, who had indeed rolled to the floor, Katie having turned for a second to protest against the other child’s swallowing a reel of cotton. Mary’s blue eye took in the whole room at once, and a lump came to her throat as she hugged the heavy child close.

She thought of the beautifully arranged nurseries at Borrowdaile used for less than a week, and closed since then. She realized through what terrible straits Abby Hardy must have come to be able to live in a room like this. It wasn’t the poverty of it; it was the dull, hopeless untidiness, the lack of any attempt at ornament or even order, that told her so much.

At length Mrs. Hardy, having quieted the baby, gave it to Katie, and sent her downstairs. Then she came and tried to take the other child from Mary.

“It was very kind of you, I am sure, Lady Yarrow,” she said, “to hold that heavy boy. I often wonder why our children are so fat; neither Mr. Hardy nor I were ever fat, and Harold isn’t particularly *healthy*——”

But Mary held the child tight. “No, no, Mrs. Hardy, let me keep him, please. And—please sit down, and let me say something to you.”

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Mrs. Hardy sat down, folding her crumpled shawl afresh. "I'm sure I don't know what Mr. Hardy would say if he knew I let you come up here. The drawing-room is really rather nice, only it's so cold."

"That's just what he mustn't know," Mary interrupted her eagerly. "You mustn't tell him. And you mustn't tell him what I'm going to say now. Did you know that I saw him this morning?"

"No. He was not at home for luncheon, and I only saw him for a few minutes—when was it?"

Mary laughed. "Near the village—and he was abominably rude to me!"

"Rude! King! I am sure you misunderstood him, Lady Yarrow. My husband is never rude."

"But he was. He treated me as no man has a right to treat one of his friends, who is very proud of being his friend."

"Oh, Lady Yarrow, please explain to me. I don't understand, and you don't look angry." The poor woman's eyes filled with tears, and she clasped her hands, thin hands that to Lady Yarrow seemed more pitiful in their useless whiteness than would have been the most work-worn in such a house.

"I am not angry, Mrs. Hardy. It was *he* who was angry, and this is why. You will not mind my saying that I know you to be very poor, and to be very poor when one has children must be—terrible, and cruel, and hideous. Mr. Hardy was angry at me for telling him that he is egoistic and wrong-headed in refusing for his chil-

dren the help my husband has for years been longing to give him."

"Help? How do you mean?"

"I mean money," Mary went on boldly. "Money is the only thing that can help you. Just think how unreasonable and unjust he is. If he were my husband's brother, or—even a distant cousin, and his heir, he would not hesitate to let Borrow help him. Don't you see?"

"Lady Yarrow," Mrs. Hardy said, with a certain dignity, "we can not borrow money, for we could never pay it back. As our children grow older, we of course grow poorer, and God knows how it will end; but we could never pay back a penny if we borrowed it."

Mary rose. "I must go, dear Mrs. Hardy, for I am deathly afraid of Mr. Hardy. You are a woman of sense, and you are a mother. Believe me, if my little boy had lived, and we had been poor, I should not have hesitated one second. I should not have let my husband's oldest friend *lend* me money; I should have been generous to him, and to my child, and taken the money as a gift."

She took a tight roll of paper from her pocket, and opening Abby Hardy's hand closed the fingers over it. "That is not money," she went on hurriedly, "it is—it is little frocks and little shoes——"

"It is bread and meat, Mary Yarrow—it is bread and meat," cried the older woman, sinking into a chair and sobbing helplessly. "You don't know what it has been. You can't know, and I've no spirit left; I can not refuse to take it. King would kill me, but I can't help it."

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Mary took her in her arms and kissed her. "I can't say how generous you are, and how I thank you," she said. "Only women can do such things. Now I must go, and—be careful, Mrs. Hardy, and don't let him notice. Don't tell him I was here."

Without waiting for an answer she ran downstairs and into the evening, her cheeks flushed with triumph. She was heartily glad to have been able to help the poor woman whose heart certainly was slowly breaking, and there was another sentiment mixed with this one—delight at having at last got the better of King Hardy's obstinacy.

She met him in the village, and rather to her alarm, he stopped her. "I beg your pardon, Lady Yarrow," he said, with his curious, stiff humility, "for having been so rude to you and Mr. Dudley this morning. I am also sure that you both—meant well."

"I forgive you very willingly, Mr. Hardy," she answered, holding out her hand, "though you were entirely in the wrong. May I ask whether you *did* throw my uncle over the cliff? I couldn't find him when I went back, and have not seen him since."

Hardy laughed. "No, I—only sent him home the other way; I was bound to have it out with you. And now——"

"Now," she interrupted, "I suppose that you have had the satisfaction of snubbing me so thoroughly, you are feeling much set up and inclined to say '*nunc dimittus.*'" Later she told her husband that she had been mentally running her tongue out at him all the while.

CHAPTER VI

THE southern room at the end of the hall at Liscom House had been chosen by Madame Perez for her boudoir, because of a great square window that let in the sun, and a small conservatory at the opposite end that she had filled with plants and flowers, and the door of which was always open, filling the room with the smell of damp earth and green things.

When King Hardy was shown into this room, one morning about a week after Lady Yarrow's visit to his wife, he paused for a minute on the threshold, literally taken aback by the blaze of color that met his eyes.

The walls were covered with red silk, the low chairs were filled with cushions of the same color, and on the oak floor was spread a magnificent old Turkey carpet in which, though red was again the predominant note, all the old bright colors were blended into a feast of luxuriant brilliance, softened by time into the perfection of harmony.

Hardy stood staring at this masterpiece of an art of which he had formerly been a not wholly ignorant devotee, until a low laugh from Madame Perez, whom he had not seen, aroused him, and he went quickly forward, holding out his hand. "What a paradise you have made

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of this old room," he said, "and where did you find that rug?"

She laughed again, this time at his abruptness. "I got it years ago in the East. It is a good one, isn't it?"

"It is a treasure." He sat down by the big fire-place in which great logs smouldered, and drew a deep breath. "Red is the most beautiful color in the world," he went on, looking around. "Sometimes I am really *hungry* for it. And this is just the right shade. I have often wondered why so few rooms are hung with it."

Madame Perez smiled. She could not tell him that most women would look like ghosts surrounded by the splendid color, and his unexpected enthusiasm surprised and amused her. He was the last man in the world whom she would have suspected of a love of color.

The very water-colors in the narrow gold or ivory frames were full of that to-day rather neglected charm; not a gray sea, but a bit of blue water dazzling in its brilliance; not a dull cloudy sky was there, but a sunrise and a dawn vied with each other in the splendor of their purple and gold, their rose and silver.

A curious note introduced into the scheme of the room was a life-size copy of the Venus de Milo, who stood, cold and white, yet living vividly, in one corner, outlined against a square of Turkish embroidery. Hardy's keen gray eyes traveled quickly from wall to wall, from picture to picture, and then back to the rug, which was the best of all for him, not excepting, she noticed quite unresentfully, the beautiful woman in the white woolen

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gown who sat opposite him, bending over a tapestry frame.

At length Hardy spoke. "You must think me quite mad, Madame Perez, but as I said, red is an old passion of mine, and when I was a boy I lived with an uncle who had one of the first collections of Turkey carpets in England, so—all this is a delight to me."

"I am very glad. There is so little out-of-door color in this country that a poor barbarian like me must make herself a nest where the primitive passion for it can be satisfied."

"All passions are primitive," he returned. "Civilization has had no power over them, any more than it has had over the features of man. Two eyes, a nose and a mouth we had in the beginning, and two eyes, a nose and a mouth we have now. It is the same with Love, Hate, Revenge and the rest of them—they are all there, as they were in Cain's day."

She paused in her work, a needle threaded with gold poised in the air. "You think that?"

"Yes; why not? I don't think it, I know it. So do you know it. So does every one who is honest with himself."

"Time has, according to your Darwin, done away with tails," she protested, to lead him on.

"Because tails were not essential to life—taking for granted the correctness of Darwin's theory, in which I don't believe——"

She laughed. "Is a nose essential to human life? I doubt it; yet we still have noses."

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“ Anger is not essential, nor jealousy—but they are part of a whole, and as I started out by saying, as primitive.”

“ We of the South are more primitive than you Northerners. How do you account for that? ” she went on.

Hardy sat for some time staring at the rug, his head on one hand.

“ As a rule you are less well educated,” he returned, after a rather long pause. “ Your primitive passions are less crowded than ours by cultivated tasks, fads, and so on. Southern women are often like children——”

“ Have you been in Southern countries, then? ”

He sat up in his chair with a jerk. “ Yes, long ago, when I was young. Madame Perez, I hope you have not forgotten your promise to help my poor people? ”

“ No. I have not forgotten.”

“ I came this afternoon to beg you to give me some money for a poor family whose father has just died. There are eight children; the mother is ill, and they are in a very bad way.”

She rose and going to a little table, opened the drawer and came back, dragging her draperies like a lazy goddess, a purse in her hand. “ How much shall I give you, Mr. Hardy? ”

“ A five-pound note would mean everything to me—but I ought to tell you that the family is not what we call a deserving one. The mother is ill, but she also drinks, and the children are no better than they should be.”

“ Oh, I don't mind that at all, you know,” she an-

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swered, giving him the money. "I am so full myself of more or less wonderful capacity for evil, that I have a sympathy for the wicked. I am sure I should steal and swear and go to the dogs if I were poor and hungry. One says go to the dogs?"

The sudden little air of appeal was attractive, and he laughed as he thanked her for the money.

"You are very humble minded. I do not believe you could ever be so very wicked."

"But yes! The tax on wickedness might be progressive, like the income tax. Poor people should be allowed to steal a little, and lie, more than we who are rich."

"That is a very original idea," he answered, sitting down again, though he had meant to go. "If carried out, it would produce a revolution in society."

"Yes. For instance, the man who is a gentleman and politely unkind to his wife, should be more punished than the peasant who jumps on his, with his boots on."

"But the lady never tells—at least she never has her husband up before the Bench—it would be hard to prove."

"Ha! ha! One knows. But in more extreme cases my plan would be practicable. The duke who is untrue to his wife in the polite civilized way, should be fined half his fortune, whereas the bricklayer who runs away and leaves his wife ought to be fined, say, a tenth of his wages."

Hardy, of course, saw her weak point, and pounced on it, and suddenly, finding themselves so seriously discussing the problematical justice of a problematical law,

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they burst out laughing, and he took his leave, thanking her again for her aid, and accepting with pleasure her invitation to come and see her again soon. The rest of the afternoon he passed in the village making visits and buying a few necessities of life for the poor family whose shortcomings had had so little effect with the generosity of the strange woman at Liscom House. Hardy was very happy that afternoon. He was bringing help to children, he had been amused, Madame Perez no longer threw him into the depths of memory, and the recollection of the charming room and the beautiful rug gave him a growing sense of delight.

Half unconsciously he put off the moment of his return home, but at length it came, and as he went up the garden path he stood still for a minute, and looking up at the sky, in which a few cold stars already shone, he gathered up his strength to fight against the reaction he knew must come.

The modern curse of introspection was his, with all its danger and horror. In the long years that he had lived in his poverty, he had learned to scan his every thought, his every act, not with the sympathetic eyes of one who can forgive himself much, but with a cold sense of justice that crucified him over and over.

Physically, he had himself under an almost perfect control; he could and did go without sleep, without food, without proper clothing, either to help some one else, or to punish himself, time and time again.

But the involuntary side of his mind was stronger than the voluntary; he had never gained an enduring

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mastery over his moods ; at times a great wave of disgust at himself, his life, his surroundings bore down on him and overwhelmed him completely for the time. He was in no way a sensuous man, and believed that he could have been content with little, but the lack of that little threatened to overpower him, and he knew it.

Standing there under the stars he realized that his unusual happiness and contentment of that afternoon was bound to be followed by a fall into the depths of emotional torment. He prayed for help, and knowing that the prayer would not be fulfilled in any human way, went slowly into the house.

The first thing that met his eyes on entering was Mac-Dougall, sitting on the lowest step of the stairs, a sugar-bowl in his lap, a pleasant smile on his blotched face. " Good ! " the child said. He was the least attractive of all the children, and now, in his soiled apron and frowsy hair, looked more than ever uninteresting.

" Give me the sugar-bowl, dear ; you will be ill," Hardy said, gently. " Where is mamma ? "

" Bed. Mamma ill."

As Hardy started upstairs, Katie came rushing down carrying Harold, tightly rolled in a shawl, a woollen scarf about her own face, which was red with tears. " Oh, Mr. Hardy," she said, " she's very bad this time, and the doctor was here, and Miss Tench took all the children home for the night. She carried little Baby, so I'm taking Harold now."

Hardy sighed. He was not alarmed ; he was used to these occasions and to the kindly interposition of Maria

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Tench, who always sent the children back ill from over-eating.

“ Perhaps I’d better carry Harold down to Miss Tench’s,” he suggested. “ Mrs. Hardy might need you. And I’ll take MacDougall, too.”

“ Oh, no, Mr. Hardy,” the girl returned, giving the baby into his arms and unwinding her scarf, thereby displaying a much swollen and glossy cheek, “ MacDougall has a bad throat, and the doctor said as he wasn’t to go out. ’E’ll be a good boy, won’t you, dear? ”

Hardy sighed again as he went down the garden path. MacDougall, then, would fall to his share. When he had given Harold to good Miss Tench, and said good-night to the children, who were enjoying themselves as noisily as was usual on such occasions, to them the most festive of the year, he hurried home, and went up to see his wife, whom he found in a most exceptional state of irritation. She had been in bed with neuralgia for the three days following Lady Yarrow’s visit, and had that afternoon planned to go to the village the next day and buy some new flannel, two small pairs of shoes and one or two other inconspicuous luxuries before her illness. And now the poor woman lay in bed, the flannel was unbought, and in a little card-case in a drawer near at hand lay the money, as useless to her for weeks as though it had been in China!

After vainly trying to soothe her, Hardy went downstairs. On his writing table lay a letter with the printed address of the publisher to whom he had sent his book. It was a letter, not the usual bulky package! He took it

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up, turning it over and over with hands that shook. It meant so much to him. Then suddenly he slipped to his knees and prayed aloud, fiercely, passionately: “ Oh, God, you know, you know. You have seen. Let it be that they have accepted it. Let it be. My children are growing up to be savages. I am growing hard and bad. So little would help us. *You know*. In His name who died out of His pity for us, pity me now, and let it be.”

Without rising, he reached for the letter and opened it—“ And therefore beg to return the MS. with thanks.” Hardy rose with a rough laugh. The package was there, too, just outside the circle of lamplight. He tore it open, looked at the carefully written pages on which he had spent so much time, and in which he had just now had such hope, and, crushing them down into the embers in the fire-place he watched them flare up and burn.

CHAPTER VII

AN hour later, his hat jammed tight down on his brow, his coat-collar turned up, Hardy stood at the top of the steep flight of wooden steps that led down to Cliff, to the little watering-place, Sabley-on-Sea, in his parish. The wind had come up and blew strongly against him with an occasional scurry of dry snow, but he did not notice it, although he had no overcoat on. He hardly knew how he came to be where he was; he had been walking aimlessly over the downs until he was tired, but he had no recollection of leaving the house, nor of a determination to come to Sabley. After standing for some time gazing through the darkness at the lights of the little town below him, he went slowly down the steps, clinging close to the railing as the wind shook the frail structure until it quivered. He had eaten nothing since luncheon, and it was now about seven o'clock. He was hungry, and, worn out with the agony of his torturing thoughts, limp and weak. But as he reached the sandy path at the foot of the steps he drew a deep breath of relief, for his mind, worn out, was in a pleasant, lazy, blank condition, free from active pain, and content.

Sabley, a town of 10,000 inhabitants, was still awake,

and as it was Saturday night the shops were open. Hardy went slowly down the little street, pausing from time to time to look in the lighted shop-windows, with no particular destination in view.

In a short time he would have to turn back towards the dark downs where the wind, he now remembered, blew so hard, but in the meantime the street was comparatively sheltered, and the shops pleasant to see. Sabley as a whole was given over to Dissent, but its few Church of England members were parishioners of Hardy's, though the summer visitors went to a smart new church about a mile the other side of the town. As the weary man leaned against the railing before a very large and attractive shop-window towards the end of the street, it occurred to him that the shop belonged to one of his parishioners, and he went in.

"Harper," he said, as the man hurried forward to meet him. "Don't you think you'd better take down that advertisement of Leroy's? It's a very indecent picture, and you're a church warden, you know."

Harper rubbed his chin respectfully, as though it had been his Rector's. "The girl on a bieycle, you mean, sir? Well, I don't know, Mr. 'Ardy. It is a bit loud, but it's this way, sir. The public likes its things loud nowadays; their game, their noospapers an' their pictures. Leroy's champagne ain't much good, between you an' me, sir, an' the picture ain't much good neither, but they *goes*. That's it, Mr. 'Ardy, they *goes*."

"Well, well, I can't force you, Harper, but I'm sorry you look at it in that way. What's bad is bad, there's no

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getting around that, and you are in a responsible position; you have an influence——”

Harper was fond of his Rector, and valued his good opinion. “Seeing as you looks at it *that* way, Mr. 'Ardy,” he hastened to say, “I'll take it down, and—you look played out, sir, won't you take a glass of Marsala with me? I 'ear as 'ow Mrs. 'Ardy, poor lady——” The Rector held out his hand.

“Thanks, no Marsala, Harper. Yes, Mrs. Hardy is ill. I—I must be getting back to her.”

“Nothing I can do for you, sir? No coffee nor chaw'e'late? I've got Sooehard's now, the very latest, I assure you. Sabley knows what's what!” Hardy explained that they always drank tea, and were supplied for the present, and escaped from the man's well-meant importunities into the cold air which was now filled with small thick flakes of whirling snow.

Some of the shops were being closed, and at the door of one of them he was stopped by the owner, who was in the act of putting up the shutters.

“Ah. Good evening, Mr. 'Ardy. A cold evening, sir.”

“Good evening, Glegg.”

The little book-shop was a never-ceasing temptation to the book-hungry man, and now, as he stood in the snow, looking into the lighted, book-lined room, he was as much to be pitied, if not more, than the conventional tramp before the cook-shop.

“I've a lot of new books just down, sir,” Glegg went on, setting the shutter on the ground and making way

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for the clergyman to pass in. "An' I take all the best magazines now, too. Perhaps Mrs. 'Ardy might like the Queen or the Lady's Pictorial?"

"I'll take a Queen for her, Glegg; it may amuse her."

"All them books there is new, sir," the bookseller went on, rolling up the magazine. "And all but one is novels! It's wonderful how novels does sell, nowadays. That one on top, the red one, is the book of the day, Mr. 'Ardy. 'The Heart of Philada.' I've not read it myself, but it's in the third edition and the papers is full of it."

Hardy opened the book carelessly; anything to keep his eyes from the sober volumes behind him. "Bah!" he exclaimed, suddenly, throwing the book down, "filthy stuff!"

"Yes, it is pretty bad, Mr. 'Ardy, what I've seen, but—that's what sells nowadays. The worse the book the greater the sale."

"It is outrageous," Hardy answered, paying for his magazine and taking it. "It is horrible."

"'Orrible it is, Mr. 'Ardy—but that's wot the public wants nowadays. One sees it everywhere, and the more it gets—the more it wants! Why, *some* of them novels, written by women, too, most of 'em, I wouldn't offer 'em to you, Mr. 'Ardy! Good evening, Mr. 'Ardy—thank you."

Hardy fought his way back through the darkness and the storm, glad of the darkness, and was met at the house door by Tench, just going home. "Another girl,

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Hardy," the little doctor said, shaking hands with him, and omitting the conventional congratulation. " Good God, man, where have you been? You look worse than your wife! "

Hardy laughed. " I forgot my dinner and have been tramping about. I was in Sabley—it is cold——"

Tench pulled him in the house and looked at him sharply. " You take a glass of hot whisky and water when you've eaten, and go to bed. I don't like your looks, Hardy, and I don't want you to go to pieces."

" I shan't go to pieces. I'm all right. Thanks, Tench. Good night."

Hardy took off his coat and boots, put on his dressing-gown and, after drinking a glass of milk, went upstairs.

His wife was asleep, and the new baby lay beside her. He stood by them for a few minutes. Abby looked ill, she *was* ill, there was another baby—his book was burnt—all these things were, and he did not care particularly. As he turned softly to go downstairs, the nurse came in.

" I'm glad you've come, sir, she took on awful. I never see her so upset, poor dear. She kept talking about when Algy was born, and—the flannel skirts she made him. It was a pity to hear."

Hardy started. He remembered the flannel skirts and all the other little preparations; he remembered her joy, and his; their plans, their hopes. His eyes filled with tears, and he was about to go downstairs when she awoke, and seeing him, began to sob feebly. " Did you see her, King? Poor little thing! It is so awful that she isn't welcome. Do you remember when Algy was born? It

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was so different. Oh, King, I am so tired of it all, and I am so wicked.”

Filled with remorse and pity he knelt by her and tried to comfort her. “We’ll name her—shall we?—Theodora? You know what it means? And we will love her dearly. I think she will be very pretty, Abby, and have your pretty hair. My poor girl, don’t ery——”

Gradually she became quiet and at length sent him to her drawer to fetch her a handkerchief. As he closed the drawer, something fell from the handkerchief to the floor, and after wiping his wife’s eyes and kissing her, Hardy picked up a little card-case and, to avoid the slight noise of reopening the drawer, carried it downstairs with him. He closed the house, banked up the kitchen fire to save the worn-out and sleepy Katie, tucked MacDougall into his crib, and went back to his study. His fire was out, and as he rebuilt it, the crisp black sheets that had been the book he loved, caught his eyes.

“It was no use. Such books don’t sell, as Glegg said,” he thought, wearily. “It was well written and full of hard study, but they don’t sell.”

When the fire was burning brightly, he rose from his knees and went to his writing-table. He had no sermon for the next day, as he had meant to write it that evening. The subject was thought out, he knew all that he wished to tell his people, and had only to write it down.

He looked at his watch; it was not yet eleven, and he could not sleep. The big sheet before him, Hardy took up his pen, the same with which he had written the book,

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and wrote in his small, neat hand the text he had chosen. "In my Father's house are many mansions." He was very fond of the idea of the divine Fatherhood; the tenderness of it appealed to him as something of particular importance to his poor little congregation, and it often entered into his simple sermons. To-night, touched by the scene with his wife, and by the sight of the helpless little child upstairs, he wrote a few phrases full of warmth and truth that brought comfort to himself. He wrote easily, in pure English, free of long words, and his conscientious wish to avoid phrases that his people could not grasp, together with his scholarly purism of thought, had given him a style that he knew was good. At the end of the first page he paused and re-read what he had written.

"It is good," he said aloud. "I can write, whatever the publishers may choose to do!" He turned the page, took up his pen and wrote: "This thought of God's being our Father——"

Suddenly his left hand fell on the old card-case he had thrown down on the table, and still thinking of his sermon, he opened the little book, in which, long ago, Abby had kept her cards. A second later the white paper lay before him unfolded. It was a hundred-pound note.

Sweat stood on his forehead, his hands shook, and then his quick mind had found the truth. Lady Yar-row's meeting him in the village; her contented smile; Abby's happy face that evening. He knew. He knew, and it must be hours before he could confront Lady Yar-row; days before he could tell his wife of his discovery.

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A night to be lived through before he could speak to any one, during which he must suffer alone. For the first time in his life he was angry with his wife; he hated her for humiliating him. For an hour he sat there, staring at the bank note, his face gray and set. It was horrible, but worse was to come. For the time came, towards morning, when, in the ghostly light from the window he had thrown open, there came to him the realization of what the hundred pounds must have meant to his wife before she could consent to take money from Mary Yarrow. He felt the sting of their poverty as it must seem to the poor mother; he felt the ache in her heart at seeing her children hungry and half ragged. She had suffered beyond her strength, and tempted, had fallen.

The man groaned aloud in his misery. Could he put the card-case with its secret back in its hiding place and—ignore his discovery? Could he accept the ignominy of charity for his wife's sake? There was no moral wrong in living on alms. Could he do it? He had no way of making good the loss to his wife and his children. His book was a failure and he had destroyed it—suppose he had no right to deprive them of this honestly come by, humiliating aid——

The momentary temptation took the strength out of him, and for a minute he cowered to the window-frame, half falling. Then, suddenly, with a little hoarse cry he stumbled to his writing-table, took a fresh sheet of sermon paper and wrote at the top of it in carefully fantastic letters: “*He and Hecuba.*”

CHAPTER VIII

THE title had come into his head quite by chance, but the story grew under his hand with an amazing ease and rapidity. He wrote on, covering page after page of foolscap with his neat writing, pausing only to take a fresh sheet, or to lay the completed one out of danger of smudging.

Day came slowly, creeping at the pale windows, fighting its slow fight with the lamplight, bringing a new chill to the air. The fire went out, the lamp went out; behind the thick, gray clouds over the sea a pale yellow glow, as cold as the clouds themselves, became visible, the distorted apple-trees in the thriftless garden drawn black as the vanquished night, against it.

The nurse came soft-footed down the stairs and went into the kitchen; Hardy heard the noise of pouring coal, the slam of a distant door, without realizing it; the broad table was sown thick with paper, the floor near him as well.

On and on he wrote, his brows, drawn deep over his eyes, half hiding their steady light as he worked. For years the man had read no new novels, and very few old ones; he had no theories as to novel writing, or as to the style in which they should be written. He made no plan

for his book, blocked out no chapters; did not know even the names of his characters until, when he needed them, then they were ready named, as clear to him as if they were printed under his eye.

He was, he felt, subconsciously, not only writing a novel to gain money; he was laying a ghost, killing the living torment of years. For he was writing his own story. It was the story of his own youth, when, sinning, he had been happy as he had never been since in his life-struggle for goodness; it was the story of that year in his life which, in his real purity and goodness, seemed to him the most horrible and unforgivable in the world; it was the outcome of years of bitter longing and remorse, so closely interwoven that he could hardly disentangle the meshes that had seemed to hold him fast as in a frightful net of steel.

And in what may be called his literary simplicity, he was telling the story, a story as old and as new as the hills, in the first person, without the least attempt at literary adornment, describing the scenes with a minute fidelity that he himself did not realize, it being the essence of the thousands of times that he had not thought of them, but been literally possessed by the memory of them.

There was, in the actual facts of the case, absolutely not one original or even dramatic circumstance, until the very last. He had loved the woman, she had loved him, and they had betrayed the husband and his friend. In the end they had been discovered, the husband had challenged the young Englishman, who found in himself all

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the horror of bloodshed that was a part of his character, and yet, not daring to refuse the man he had injured the satisfaction that to that man was the only one possible, was obliged to accept the challenge.

Hardy had fired in the air; his bullet, striking a tree, rebounded, struck the Italian, and killed him instantly. After this the hatred of himself, the forced interview with the woman, the sight of whom drove him nearly to madness, his flight——

It was to this climax that his characters were leading him rather than he them, though as yet he was in the pleasant days of the very beginning; the days of lazy driving over pleasant mountain roads, of evenings in the dusky drawing-room when the light of the scattered wax candles caught gleams of gold from high cornices, and flickered over the faded satin of the scant furniture; of fire-fly lit garden walks, heavy with the odors of thick-skinned white flowers. As he wrote, a faint smile rested on the man's face, revealing itself in the relaxed muscles about the invisible mouth, and softening the lines about his eyes.

The house was awake now; Katie in the next room opened the blinds with a subdued bang; and the regular sweep of a broom reached him. It was this sound that at length aroused him to a sense of his surroundings. His pen paused, began again its steady motion, paused again, and fell from his fingers, while he looked up with haggard, questioning eyes. It was day!

Rising, he went to the window, moving stiffly with cramp and cold, and opened it. Beyond spread the sea,

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the sun had come out, the clouds full of pale color that was reflected in the still gray water.

“ ‘Ye waters of the Lord, bless ye the Lord,’ ” Hardy said aloud, stretching his arms out into the morning, and drawing in deep breaths of the chill air. He heard the nurse walking softly but heavily about overhead.

After a short pause he gathered his papers and locked them away in a drawer. As he did so, his eyes fell on the neglected sermon and the little card-case. Sitting down he wrote on a piece of paper “From King Hardy to Lady Yarrow, who will understand,” and putting it and the bank note into an envelope, addressed it to Lady Yarrow. Then, avoiding the servant, he went up to his room. The day passed as a day in a dream.

In church he watched the five small faces ranged by good Miss Tench, hardly realizing that they belonged to him. They did not anger him, as they had in his days of madness often done; they were merely far off, remote from his consciousness.

He preached an old sermon, one of his earlier ones—a better one, as to substance, he realized, with a curious spirit of criticism, though decidedly inferior in style, than any of his later compositions. It was on the Beatitudes.

“Blessed are the pure in heart”—he paused imperceptibly as he came to the words. What was he? What was the story locked away in his drawer at home?—“for they shall see God.”

As he was putting on his coat in the vestry, after the

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service, Harper, the grocer and church-warden, came in. "Good morning, Mr. 'Ardy. That was a very fine sermon this morning, sir."

"I'm glad you liked it, Harper."

"I 'ope, sir, as what you said about the pure in 'eart wasn't a—little hit at me? I mean about that h'advertisement."

Hardy rose from tying his boot lace, the veins in his temples dark. "What an idea, Harper! Not in the least, not in the least, man. The sermon was written two years ago."

"I'm very glad. Very glad, indeed. I'm as easy going as most men in my line o' business, Mr. 'Ardy, but I wouldn't like it said as I was impure o' heart."

Hardy shook hands with him and struck out over the fields homewards.

The conversation had given him a slight shock, but he was too busy forcing his thoughts away from the story with which his brain was filled, into a suitable Sunday channel, to have it make any deep impression on him. Conscientiously he went through his round of duties, read the evening service, taught his class of young men in the school, and read for an hour from the Bible to a peculiarly critical and captious old woman whose reverence and admiration for Christ seemed to express itself by a systematic and ill-natured depreciation of those who surrounded Him.

"But Christ himself loved John, you know, Mrs. Burrage," Hardy protested, patiently, after an outburst of scorn over some fancied delinquency on the part of

that apostle. Mrs. Burrage, who chewed tobacco, spit with venom and accuracy into the fire.

“ ‘E was lonesome-like, no doubt, poor dear, and John was the likeliest, ‘cordin’ to the pictures. Some-thin’ like my ‘Enry before ‘e took to drink.”

Briggs, the bricklayer, who, thanks to Lord Yarrow’s generosity, had had the best of care, was also to be visited that day, and Hardy bravely partook, by the bed on which the injured man still lay, of tea and cakes prepared by Mrs. Briggs herself, that good woman having become quite reconciled to a parson who brought such substantial benefits with him.

Hardy dined that evening at the Tenchs, and answered the thousand questions of the older children regarding the new sister, on the desirability of whose presence in the world there was a marked division of opinion.

Tench, when the two men were smoking together over the fire, explained at some length to Hardy the nervous condition of his wife. “ She needs building up, Hardy. A complete change would be the best thing for her, but I suppose you can’t—hem—spare her, so we shall have to try what port and beef-juice will do. I’ve never seen her so weak as she is this time, even after the twins.”

Hardy winced. “ Yes, yes. Port and beef-juice,” he repeated. “ Anything else you can suggest, Tench? ”

And Tench, the kindest little man in the world, longing to help his friend, whose straits he perfectly realized, could say no more.

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At about ten o'clock Hardy went home. His wife was awake, and, thinking of the bank note that she supposed to be in her drawer, in a rather hopeful frame of mind. "I have been thinking," she said, "of cutting down the merino cloak your Aunt Merriek gave Anna, and having it dyed for a coat for Harold. Then my flannel petticoats will do very nicely for the older girls—I quite hate flannel of late, for some reason. And—oh, you will see—I have a whole trunkful of old things that will look like new when I've made them over. It's only a little strength I need."

He knew that she was lying; that the old things that would look as well as new were to be new—bought with Mary Yarrow's money—the money he had sent back that morning. With an ache in his breast he listened to her cunning paving of the way. She had always been the most truthful of women, and now she was lying to him. Silently he listened, and at length left her, satisfied with her cleverness, and went downstairs. The house was very still; it was after eleven. He sat down and tried to read. It was impossible, his brain refused to obey him and wandered off repeatedly to the forbidden subject.

He opened the window and stood looking out into the darkness. It brought him back to that other darkness, the palpitating, fragrant darkness of summer southern Italy that is only not light. Seizing his hat, he rushed out into the garden and paced up and down the narrow path repeating aloud parts of the Old Testament learned as a task when he was a boy.

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At length the Borrowdaile church clock struck midnight, and content with his fantastic adhesion to the letter of the Law against the Spirit of which he was tranquilly transgressing, the man went back to the house, took out his MS. and began work at it again.

CHAPTER IX

KING HARDY was a little drunk. No one but he knew it, for he had himself well in hand, and after the first glass of champagne had gone to his head—a toast proposed by the Rector of Borrowdaile to a certain change in South Africa—he had been very careful.

He sat between Rebecca Dudley and a little Miss Lyon. Opposite him, seen, to his slightly bewildered gaze, as through a mist of pink roses and dancing lights, Madame Perez's bare shoulders and beautiful head.

Gravely he told himself that her gown was of black velvet; he had seen it before dinner.

Lady Yarrow wore white, Miss Lyon pink, Mrs. Dudley purple, with a necklace of amethysts mounted in Roman gold.

Hardy had been very hungry, for he had sent his share of the family luncheon to a poor family in the village, but after his soup, found his appetite to have fled, and he sat, talking little, gazing dreamily at the flowers, the silver, and at the beautiful woman opposite him, in a delicious half stupor in which he knew he could indulge, protected as he was by his character for ascetic sobriety, and his impassive face.

“ How is Mrs. Hardy ? ” Mrs. Dudley leaned forward over the low tangle of roses.

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"She is very well, thanks." He spoke slowly, his eyes fixed steadily on her.

"And the little girl?"

"The little girl is very well, too," he went on. Suddenly a cold fear came over him. Suppose some one asked him the new baby's name! He had forgotten it. And Mrs. Dudley always asked the new baby's name; it was one of her principles that people *liked* to have her ask the new baby's name. What on earth should he say if she *should* ask it?

Then he found that he didn't care one way or the other. If she did, he'd tell the truth and own that he had forgotten; they would all think him mad, but that did not matter; whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad; possibly the gods wished to destroy him; that didn't matter, either——

"Oh, no, *I* didn't read it," Miss Lyon was saying. "Papa wouldn't let me. He said it was horrid. Did you read it, Sir Ludovic?"

Sir Ludovic closed his mouth, a proceeding with which he was obliged to prepare a remark, unkind nature having made it slightly open in moments of repose. "Oh, yes, I read it. All of us fellows did. Don't see any harm in it anyway. Don't see why your father wouldn't let you read it. He took you to see 'Mrs. Tanqueray.'"

"Oh, Sir Ludovic," Lady Yarrow came to the rescue, "it is a horrid book. I think Miss Lyon is perfectly right. There is no reason for a girl's reading such stuff." Sir Ludovic, who in spite of his loose-hinged jaw, and

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consequent air of amiable foolishness, realized perfectly well that Miss Lyon was a year older than he himself, therefore twenty-six, and that she had the amiable though unexpressed wish of being the best of wives to him, subsided into silence with a smile.

Hardy looked at Miss Lyon curiously. In a few months she would be reading and denying his book. He wondered whether she would like it? Madame Percz turned to speak to Mr. Dudley, and the diamonds on her neck stirred brilliantly.

“Black velvet,” Hardy reminded himself again. Her gown was no lower than Lady Yarrow’s or even the simple Miss Lyon’s, but the splendid long slope of her shoulders and the magnolia-like quality of her skin made her seem much more décolleté than the others. Yarrow’s latest picture of her was just finished, and after dinner was to be shown.

Mrs. Dudley, who had seen it a few days before, was telling of a portrait of herself painted in her youth by a very celebrated German painter of whom no one present had ever heard.

“I wore a blue gown and a lace scarf just open at the neck,” she said.

The dinner went on. Hardy listened, and spoke little, but this was his habit and no one noticed particularly. The atmosphere, the soft brilliance of the lights, the two glasses of wine he had drunk, the scent of the roses, had a most delicious effect upon him. He was very happy; happier than he had been for years. For a fortnight he had worked at his book, living in it, knowing no

effort, no weariness beyond that in his hand that from time to time forced him to lay down his pen and stretch his cramped fingers. Too conscientious to neglect the least of his duties, he had gone through the monotonous round day after day, auditing the accounts of the different little clubs and addressing the two societies and visiting the sick as well as reading the usual services.

Therefore he had been compelled, in his overpowering interest in his book, to steal time for it from the late nights and the early mornings. Wrapped in his great-coat, for the winter had set in very cold, and he would not allow himself extra fires, he sat hour after hour at his writing table, his hand blue and pinched, traveling rapidly over the paper originally dedicated to a so widely different purpose. He lived at those times, existed at all others, in spite of the strong curb he put on his thoughts when once the MS. was locked away and the pen laid aside. The woman in the book, Gilda, he called her, was a living, breathing, sinning woman, no creation of a however vivid fancy; the man was himself. Himself at twenty-seven, seen and understood by himself at forty-two.

He laid bare every thought of the boy's heart, thoughts vain at first, and innocent, as the boy would not have believed them, as the man knew them to be, and then showed in his terrible truth and simplicity, the growth of the sin, the blackening of the innocence. It was all there, analyzed by a man who all unknown to himself possessed a rare gift for analysis, and in whose tortured memory the often reviewed scenes had grown

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to a perfection of truth and detail that needed only the touch of pen and ink to become alive.

The thing had taken hold of him with such a force as to obliterate all memory of his original idea in writing it. He had forgotten that he was working for money, and knew only the keen joy of artistic creation.

He had lost all feeling of anger with his wife long before he told her, very gently, of his sending the money back to Lady Yarrow, and had met Lady Yarrow for the first time after his discovery, with a dignified reproach that surprised her into begging his pardon.

Mary thought of it now, as she watched him gazing absently at the roses. He looked very tired, but somehow, nevertheless, younger and more human than she had ever seen him. The side he showed even to the friends he loved—and in his way he loved the Yarrows—was the stern side which was his armor against the world, and Mary had never suspected him of the possession of another.

The dinner was very dull. Mary Yarrow hated being dull, and these small dinners, too small for ceremony, too large for cosiness, were a cross to her. Even Mr. Dudley was not amusing; he had a bad cold in his head, and knew that he would be well scolded for it, later.

Hardy had eaten nothing, and before the welcome signal for the ladies to go passed him on its way to Mrs. Dudley, he hastily drained his wine glass. This state of conscious Nirvana was too delicious to forego, for once—there were too many disagreeables to be faced on the awakening.

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As he held the door open, Madame Perez paused in passing him and smiled into his eyes in a way that struck him as rather unnecessary, though not unpleasantly bewildering.

“Do not stay long,” she said. “I am going to die of boredom, and I want to talk to you.”

Hardy had had little to do with women in his life. He had studied hard at Oxford, and at five-and-twenty made a tour around the world with his uncle, who showed it to him as a planet on which flourished cities and towns interesting for their position and architecture, but filled with, on the whole, somewhat superfluous people. They traveled for two years, during which the young man met not one woman of his own class. Then, his uncle being called home from Rome on the business that proved to be the commencement of his financial ruin, Hardy had lingered in Italy, and the one woman had come into his life. Later he had in his remorse and agony buried himself in study at his uncle's country house, and had just taken orders when the crash came that reduced him from the position of heir to a very rich man to that of an absolutely penniless curate of twenty-nine with no prospects of any kind.

After a year in the north of England someone had offered him the poor living of Carbury, and before going to it he had married Abby Brent, the pretty daughter of his rector—out of a mixture of liking, loneliness, and satisfaction in her being the absolute antithesis of Silvia Aldobrandi.

These were the two women he had known, Silvia Aldo-

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brandi, a ripe woman of the world, several years older than himself, and Abby Brent, the country girl who had never been a day from home in her life, and whose simple brain could conceive no one more splendid than the sad-eyed young man who had been around the world!

He went back to the table and sat listening to a lively discussion of Lord Roberts, with absent eyes still bent on the flowers, beyond which no white shoulders now rose. He hoped Madame Perez wanted to give him more money for—for whom? He and his own family needed help more than any of his parishioners.

He burst into a sudden laugh, and Sir Ludovic looked at him approvingly. "Not a bad story, was it?" the young man asked. "And Waring vows it's true."

Lord Yarrow waited until the other men were talking together again, and then said in a low voice: "What *did* you laugh at, King?"

Hardy shook his head. "At something I was thinking of."

If she didn't want to give him money, why did she ask him to come soon? Her eyes were as yellow as a panther's—though panthers might have violet eyes for all he really knew.

"What a lot of stuff people take for granted, don't they?" he asked Yarrow. "I mean in the way of knowledge. And how little one knows from one's own observation!" Yarrow was a little surprised.

"Yes, that is true. I was thinking yesterday, while painting, what stuff people talk about complexions, for instance. Mary, as an example, looks very white, but

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in painting her I have to use a lot of blue, and the skin tints in my picture of Madame Perez are almost entirely made up of—green!”

“I should have thought yellow. By the way, how long is that boy going to scold about Lord Roberts? Your uncle is half asleep.”

Yarrow nodded. “Yes. And Mary will be half asleep upstairs. Why don’t you go? Make Mary sing.”

Hardy obeyed willingly, after drinking the rest of his wine. Things were still veiled to him in a roseate mist, but he was perfectly his own master. When he entered the drawing-room he paused for a few seconds by Lady Yarrow and Mrs. Dudley, who were politely sparing in a corner, and then went and sat down by Madame Perez, whose side Miss Lyon vacated at his approach.

“Here I am,” he said, simply.

She looked at him keenly for a few seconds, and then asked with a smile: “Well—how do you like it?”

“How do I like—what?”

“The effects of no food and too much wine.”

“How did you know?” he asked, slowly, his gray eyes fixed on hers.

“Oh, I know a number of things. Do *you* know what magnetism is?”

He laughed. “I don’t believe in it.”

“Oh, don’t you. Well, I do. And if you were a few years younger and a little different from what you have made yourself, there would be, little as I thought it the first time I saw you, a good deal between you and me.”

“What I have made myself?” What do you

mean? ” No woman had ever spoken so to him and he asked his question with serious interest.

Madame Perez laughed. “ Do you think I don’t know that your life is one struggle to be what you are not? Never mind—Lady Yarrow is going to sing. ”

The other men had come in now, and the little party sat listening, each member of it carried by the something in Lady Yarrow’s voice that made it what it was, far away from the actual scene. Even Mrs. Dudley’s eyes were fixed with a curious intensity, and her husband’s full of unconscious tears.

Hardy sat with folded arms, his head sunk on his breast, his eyes half elosed. Madame Perez watched him with the interest of a woman who has deliberately put a thought of herself into a man’s mind, and is clever enough to be able to watch it germinate.

As a matter of fact the thought was at present in a very elementary state, and Hardy more conscious of the feeling of youth that had come to him, of the exquisite lack of responsibility, the non-existence of to-morrow, than he was of any individual whatever. And if there was a personal trend in the thoughts which were too vague to be called thoughts, it was towards the Silvia Aldobrandi of the long ago.

Lady Yarrow was singing a modern French song now—“ *L’oubli me serait odieux—Seule elle peut mon mal guerir.* ” Mr. Hardy had personally no ills. Looking up he met Madame Perez’s eyes. “ *Et j’aime mieux—en mourir?* ” Lady Yarrow’s beautiful voice died

away, and after a little pause, which no one broke, she rose.

Hardy stared at her a minute, then back at Madame Perez, who was watching him curiously, but he saw neither the one nor the other.

Suddenly he held out his hand. “ Good night, Madame Perez,” he said, absently. “ I am going. I have some work to do——”

Her eyes followed him as he made his hasty adieus, and then when the door had closed behind him, a smile came to her lips, and she shrugged her shoulders slightly.

CHAPTER X

It was four o'clock, the following afternoon, and Hardy sat before his writing-table, his hands lying loosely on the green cover, his eyes vacant. The lamp was lit, but the curtains were not drawn, and the room was filled with the melancholy, uncertain shadows of mingled daylight and lamplight. The fire had gone out; the hearth was a waste of ashes. Hardy had just come in and was very tired.

He had written all night, not going to bed at all. All night, until the pale dawn crept in at the windows, he had been living in the past, loving the beautiful woman whom he called Gilda, but who was the Silvia Aldobrandi of his youth. There she had been, with her voice, her eyebrows, the quaint little movements of the hands that set her apart from all other women; and there he had been, living it all over again, aghast, horrified, yet unable to resist, because he loved her. Aldobrandi, too, had been there, small, alert, with serene vanity in his power over women, his conquests of whom he related often to the Englishman, every light word he uttered a blow to the boy's feeble defences against the evil that was besieging him. He had read it all over when he first came back

from the Yarrows—read it through a faintly swaying mist that lent at once a curious vagueness and a poignant distinctness to it all.

It was he who sat there with the beautiful woman in his arms; it was to him she whispered; he smelt the gardenias in her hair, he felt her bare arm on his neck. And then—he had come to the end of the time—the last sentence ended abruptly— This had been the point at which his conscience had awakened, that conscience that had been torturing him ever since; and it was in the state of half intoxication, while he still floated in the clouds of pleasure and luxurious dreaminess that had caught him up with his second glass of champagne, that he must take down, minutely, the record of what followed those sunny days. He had come to the tragedy. It was just here, after the walk in the olive grove, that the torturing remorse that had drawn the lines in his face, had gripped him.

Wrapped in his shabby dressing-gown he began to write. The paper swam before him, under the noiseless skimming of the pen. And here came the sudden change of style that so puzzled people later. For his view-point had changed. He had not moved, but the earth had swung around under his feet, and he saw everything differently. He saw, after, as it seemed to him, years of blindness, the folly of renunciation, the wickedness of denying to one's heart the love that is the one spark of Divinity left to us; the needlessness of regrets, lasting a lifetime, for what priggishness considers Sin.

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His anguish at parting with the woman who clung to him even when his hands were red with the blood that ran in her child's veins looked to him, in this curious enlightenment, a useless sacrifice. On and on he had written, rising unconsciously to a height of lyricism that vaguely pleased him, writing what was poetry as beautiful in its feeling and expression as it was rotten in substance.

The horror of the duel he passed over lightly; it was no longer horrible to him. It was the natural outcome of the natural sequence of events for which he had been put into the world. Aldobrandi had done what he had done, a hundred times, according to his own accounts, and now, by a stroke of ill-luck—the projecting branch of a tree causing the rebound of a bullet sent into the air with a ridiculously Quixotic intent, had cut the knot, and he, the “I” of the book, had been a thousand times a fool for his frantic refusal of the situation.

The lamp fluttered as he wrote the last words—half a page of brilliant self-mockery—and went out. He had not lighted the candle; it was day.

Going to the window he had stood there a minute, and then, hurriedly stuffing the MS. into an envelope addressed and stamped it, and, early as it was, had put on his coat and hat and going down to the village, put it in the letter box.

The air had made him curiously sleepy, and on regaining his study he had, too tired to make the effort of going upstairs, fallen asleep in his chair. An hour later

he had been called to a sick bed and a busy day had begun.

Now, towards evening, he sat, worn out, his occupation gone, his brain empty, his relaxed hands heavy on the table.

The lamp stood between him and the study door, so that when at this point a small hand began an assault on that door, and at length succeeded in opening it, he merely said, blinking under his eyebrows: "Run away, MacDougall, father is busy." Then a sudden strong smell of hot-house flowers reached him, he started, holding up his head to the light, and saw Rosalba Perez standing before him, holding the small guide by the hand. In her arms, across the dark fur of her cape and muff, she carried a great sheaf of long-stemmed red roses, such as Hardy had never seen.

"I hope I do not disturb you," she said, without coming forward. "I have brought these roses for Mrs. Hardy, and this little man who was in the garden brought me here."

"You are very kind—very kind, indeed," he stammered, dumping a doll and the nursing-bottle out of the armchair and offering it to her. "Will you not sit down?" He was overwhelmed with a two-fold confusion. His weakness the night before must, he knew, be in her memory still; then he wore the ragged dressing-gown, and his collar and cuffs lay on the table. His face whitened with his cruel embarrassment and he stood looking hopelessly at her, wordless.

"The roses were sent to me this morning from Lon-

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don, by an American. They are called American Beauties. It is a good name, don't you think? All the North American beauties I have seen are like them—with beautiful heads and too long, too slim bodies. How is Mrs. Hardy? I hope she will let me come and see her soon—informally. I love little babies.”

She talked placidly on without the slightest sign of confusion or of recognition of his, until the man had gathered his wits together and could answer her. He admired the roses, promised to take her kind messages to his wife, sent the violently protesting MacDougall to have Katie take off his coat and overshoes, and then when the door closed, he said, stiffly: “It was very kind of you to come, Mrs. Perez, but you can see for yourself that—that—we can not receive people. We are too poor. It is so cold in this room that I dare not ask you to take off your furs, or you would shiver; I am wearing this old dressing-gown to save my coat, and my collar and cuffs are on the table so that I can wear them again to-morrow. Such a house as this is no place for a woman like you to visit.” His tone grew rough as he went on, and at last was almost rude.

She listened, her eyes fixed on him, and then, after a short pause, came her answer.

“What was the name of the Scotch poet who wrote the poem, ‘A man’s a man for a’ that’?”

“Burns,” faltered Hardy.

“Good. I like you, Mr. Hardy, and I don’t care a button whether you wear a collar at home or not; I like you, and I don’t care whether your dressing-gown is old

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or not; I like you, and unless you—chuck me out, I mean to stay for a few minutes, now that I'm here, because I walked and I'm tired."

He drew a deep breath. "It is very kind of you to say you like me, though I'm sure I don't see why you should. A clergyman who gets drunk at a dinner is not a particularly estimable specimen of humanity, and I have been very rude to you."

She laughed. "What a terribly uncompromising man you are. You were no more drunk the other night than I was."

"I was. I did not stagger, and my tongue was not thick, but I was under the influence of wine, and you know it."

"Very well. Just as you like. Are you writing a sermon?" She turned towards the table.

"No."

"I'll not ask whether you are writing a book, because you would bite my head off if I did. Does Mrs. Hardy like oysters?"

He stared at her. "Oysters? I'm sure I don't know."

"Then I must find out. My American adorer, practical as well as poetie, also sent me a barrel of American oysters, 'Blue-Points,' and as I happen to detest the nasty, slimy things I am graciously presenting them to my neighbors. The Yarrows love them, and so does Mr. Dudley, so you must take only a third of the barrel. Now I'm going. Tell Mrs. Hardy to try eating them raw—ugh!—if she can, and if she can't, one cooks them in

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cream or in butter. And please let me know when I may come and see the new baby and her mamma. Please don't be disagreeable, for I'm lonely, and can't bore the Yarrows all day long. Good-bye." She held out her hand, smiled, and, beaten on all sides, he accompanied her to the house door, the lamp, held high in his hand, flooding light on his shabby attire and ruffled hair.

As he opened the door, two or three of the children came running in, nearly upsetting him and the lamp.

"Dear me, are these all yours?" she asked.

"These and four more," he returned, laughing a little grimly. "Algy, you are old enough to shake hands with Madame Perez like a gentleman."

The boy, a tall, rather handsome little fellow of eleven, held out his hand and stared with evident admiration at the beautiful face looking down at him.

"I say, are you English?" he asked, with a certain shy eagerness.

"No. Why?"

With a quick glance at his father, he answered, "Because I think you must be a Circassian."

His meaning was so obvious, the compliment so sincere, that even Hardy laughed, and then, looking out into the gathering darkness, Madame Perez declared herself afraid of walking home alone, and asked Algy to accompany her.

Very shy and very proud he walked off beside her, Hardy lighting them as far as the gate, and then, still dazed from the suddenness of her onslaught and his de-

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feat, going back to the study, where the roses still lay, their pungent perfume filling the room.

“Roses—and oysters. It will be loaf sugar and lamb chops next.” He sat down and looked at the flowers. There had been no such roses then, years ago—and Silvia was a slight, thin woman, rather of the type of Duse, whose picture he had seen. There was not the least resemblance between her and this overpowering South American who wouldn’t be snubbed.

Taking the roses he went up to his wife, who, informed by MacDougall of the arrival of a beautiful lady with red flowers, was waiting impatiently to hear who it was. “Oh, *dear* me, King, how awful,” she cried, when he had given her the roses and told her who the visitor had been. “And you not even with a collar on.”

Like Mr. Tulliver, this wifely sympathy affected him in a way diametrically opposed to that which its giver not unreasonably expected.

“I was embarrassed,” he admitted, rigidly truthful, “but it was idiotic of me. There is no moral harm in a man’s wearing a ragged dressing-gown, and it is better to save one’s collar than to run up a laundry-bill. Madame Perez is a woman of sense, Abby; you will like her.”

Abby peered at him with wan eyes across the flowers. “Why, King! I shall like her, no doubt, but you are so—so——”

“So cross-grained, poor little woman. And you are right. She is a very pleasant woman, but she is no friend for us, and will probably see it herself and not

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come any more." Then he added reluctantly: "Though she did say she was coming. She is sending oysters to you." This news was too much for the poor little woman, who had not dared to utter a reproach or a protest about the returned bank note.

Without answering, she began to cry, her mouth drawn piteously, but uttering no sound.

Hardy did not notice it for a few minutes, and then, when he did, drew her head to his shoulder and held her patiently until she was quieted.

"Some one, an adorer, she said, sent them to her, and, as she dislikes them, she's dividing the barrel between Yarrow, the Dudleys and—you. Under the circumstances, you see, I really couldn't refuse."

An hour or two later the Yarrows, who were dining with Madame Perez, laughed at her childish delight in the oysters.

"I must paint you as the Goddess of Greediness," Yarrow said.

She paused, looking thoughtfully for a second at the fat little exile on her fork. "You must never tell that Terrible Révérend that I eat oysters," she said at length.

"Why?" asked Lady Yarrow, curiously. Then the other woman told the story, ending with:

"I *knew* she liked oysters—and I knew that pig-headed man would throw them at me if I did not invent some beautiful romance to salve his horrible pride—Dios! how I did lie."

CHAPTER XI

THE Bishop, describing, in connection with certain later events, his luncheon with the Rector of Carbury, grew very eloquent.

“ I had known him as a boy, you know; his uncle, poor Hardy, was my neighbor and distant cousin—and King was a charming young fellow—a little in the clouds and impracticable, all that branch of the family is—and rather more than other youths inclined to an innocent Sybaritism that made it—the whole thing that day—seem the more pitiable and incredible to me.”

Mr. Dudley nodded. “ I did my best to persuade you to come to me, if you remember,” he said.

“ I know. But my business was with him and I was afraid of hurting him. Besides, I didn’t suspect anything of that kind. My dear Charles, it is no breach of confidence to tell you *now* that I never sat down to such a meal in my life.

“ The table-cloth had a great hole in it; the silver was gritty with that sandy stuff they clean it with; the plates cracked and nicked— *She* sat there, poor woman, draped in an awful greenish shawl, her eyes filling with tears from time to time, though God knows I did my best to eat and be cheery. Cheeriness is a

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much neglected quality nowadays—and Hardy, as white as death, with a frown that made him look so like his poor uncle, yet, of course, not apologizing for anything—it was really horrible.”

Hardy, struggling to meet the good little man half way in his kindly efforts at smoothing over the situation, was in a state of mind nearer insanity than he had any suspicion of.

His Lordship came over from Sabley, where he had been visiting on some parochial business, and when it was over announced to Hardy, in his friendly little way, that he would gladly stay to luncheon if he were asked.

The rest of the morning was a horrible nightmare. Abby burst into tears when her husband announced the guest, declared that there was nothing in the house to eat; that she was ill, and that King must tell the Bishop, or get rid of him some way.

Hardy explained to her patiently that as that was out of the question she must do her best. “He knows we are poor, dear, and will not expect much.”

But he knew that any man expected more than his Lordship that day got; that the chops were burnt, the eggs in the omelet not quite irreproachable, the potatoes uneatable, and the jelly more like glue than anything else. Then the children who were present at the meal ate carelessly, bolting their food, and in spite of an occasional sharp reprimand, addressing Katie from time to time. Hardy had not fully realized before how utterly unattractive and spoiled they were. Even Algy,

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the eldest, the only one with anything approaching good looks, had, in his clumsily-made Sunday suit, something of the clodhopper. The consciousness that their bad manners were to a great measure due to their father's carelessness, did not tend to console that father.

It was one of the most horrible episodes of his life, that meal with the rosy, kindly, little Bishop, and when it was at length over, and his Lordship had hurried away, as Hardy knew, for something to eat elsewhere, he turned to his wife, and deliberately said the first word of reproach he had ever uttered to her.

"You might at least have seen that the eggs were fresh."

Sinking down on the stairs she burst into helpless, plaintive tears. "Oh, King, I know! Do you think I don't know? It is my fault and yet I can't help it. If I were different from what I am, I could bear things better; but I have no strength, no energy. It would be better if I should die. I am of no use to anybody, and you are ashamed of me."

He looked at her with cold eyes. It was true. He was ashamed of her; he was ashamed of their children; he felt within him such an unexpected capacity for cruelty that he dared not speak for a minute.

"If you were only kind to me I could bear it," she went on, sobbing still; "but you are not. Why did you take the money away from me? I could have done so much with it. If we are poor as beggars, why not own to it, and accept the alms people offer us?"

"Be still. You are my wife and I am your master.

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I am not a beggar and I will starve, and starve you and the children—as well as the Bishop—” he broke off with a fierce laugh, “ before I will accept charity. Do not forget that.”

Without pausing he turned and went into his study, locking the door behind him.

It was only a few days before Christmas, and a number of letters lay awaiting him. Mechanically he read them, taking notes of their contents; answering one or two. The events of the day had upset him to a degree that he fully recognized as inexcusable; he was perfectly pitiless to his own weakness, and while he worked the feeling of self-loathing rose stronger and stronger. Other men had burdens and bore them. His were breaking him down. He had lost his temper and spoken cruelly to his wife, who, however incapable she might be, was at least as brave as he, and who, moreover, rarely complained. A few days ago, he, a clergyman, had not only taken too much wine, but, enjoying the dulling of painful, enhancing of pleasant sensations it brought him, had deliberately drunk more.

He had written in the form of a novel, the shameful story of his own life, and was trying to sell it—and it was also the shameful story of a woman he had loved—for money. With a little ejaculation of angry disgust, he finished his work, and rising, took up his hat. After a sharp struggle with himself he went upstairs and into his wife's room. “ Abby,” he began, in the studiously gentle voice, “ I have come to beg your pardon, my dear.”

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“ Oh, King! ” she spoke in a high whisper, for the baby was asleep in her arms.

“ I was very unkind to you a little while ago,” he went on, “ and I am sorry.”

“ You are so good, King! I was impatient, too, and I know how awful it is to be so—discontented— I often am now. We have so much, after all, haven’t we? ” Happy in his words and kindness, she had already lost the impression his harshness had made on her. Above the small red face of the sleeping child her worn one smiled up at him, the eyes glassy and swollen, the thin lips dry.

Hardy set his teeth to prevent the escape of a groan. His own miserable cowardice showed plainer than ever to him, compared to her pitiful little courage. “ God has given us what He thought wisest, dear; we will try to be happy.” Then, kissing her and the baby, he went downstairs and into the cold evening air.

It is hard work, trying to be happy—possibly not worth while, after all. Striving for virtue, he pondered, as he made his way down the hill, is different; striving for strength; or for courage. After all, happiness has come to have an altogether disproportionate importance in the eyes of the world. He, with his instincts, might as well try to grow a foot taller as to be, in his circumstances, a happy man. Very well. God would forgive him his lapses, and help him to be a good one.

Without seeing her, he passed Madame Perez, who was getting into her carriage in front of the post-office

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in Borrowdaile. She paused, her foot on the step, and looked after him. “What a curious man he is,” she thought, “and how near being a most interesting one, poor fellow.” As she passed him leaning back among her furs, she repeated aloud: “*pobrecido.*”

CHAPTER XII

“WHEN I was a child,” Madame Perez said, after a long pause, during which the sound of Yarrow’s gentle movements alone broke the silence, “I had a nurse who used to tell me of a man who could see in the dark, and the thought that that man might be hidden in my room watching me as I slept, used to cause me untold terror——”

Yarrow laughed. “I accept the hint. It is rather dark, but—come and look!” As he spoke he turned on the electric light, and rising with a little groan of relief, she came, and, standing beside him, examined the progress of the picture. It was the best of the many he had painted of her, and something of its charm lay in the fact that it was painted in the dusk. He had caught the glow of her red gown, the gleam in her ruffled hair, as the last of the winter daylight lay on them, and there was something in the softness of the picture that brought out surprisingly the beauty of the vivid coloring.

“For the first time in my life,” she said, at length, “I feel vain. Am I really like that?”

“You are really like that. You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw.”

She started. “You said that just as—my husband

used to say it. Such a world of mental reservation in your voice! ”

“ Mental reservation. Possibly. There is always that when a man, loving one woman, praises the beauty of another,” he answered, slowly.

“ And sometimes when he loves the one he is praising. My husband loved me—for a time.” She sat down again, her eyes fixed absently on the gray square that was the window.

Yarrow, watching her, felt his hand go out instinctively towards a stump of charcoal that was near him. Long as he had known her and profited by what he knew was pure kindness, to paint her a dozen times, he had never seen her with just that expression. But then, it was the first time that she had ever mentioned her husband to him.

“ ‘ For a time ’? ” he repeated, very gently.

She made a long-drawn, inarticulate sound of assent in the throat. “ Yes. For a time, and in a way. I was very young. I am only five-and-twenty now.”

The light fell full on her at an angle that threw no shadows on her face. Her head, resting against a gold-embroidered pillow, was turned a little, showing the flower-like curve of the beautiful chin that would one day be too fat. Her mouth was curved into a new look almost of pathos.

Yarrow, feeling rather guilty, drew a drawing block to him, set it silently on his easel, and answered: “ How old were you? ”

“ When I married? Just seventeen. Think of the

folly of marrying a child of seventeen! What else could he expect? ”

Yarrow, who hadn't the least idea what the unknown man in question had *got*, did not answer.

“ ‘The most beautiful woman I ever saw.’ It *was* so like him! Shall I tell you about it? I have sometimes thought I would like to tell you—that I ought to. My husband is not dead, Lord Yarrow. ”

Without any particular reason, Yarrow had taken this for granted, but he could hardly say so.

“ He was unkind to you? ” he asked, sketching in the blurred mass of her hair.

“ No. Oh, no. He was a very good man, I believe. It was this way. I was at Valparaiso, visiting an aunt. There was a balcony, where I used to sit. He used to pass by. He was very handsome; I can see him now. He came to the house one evening—it was a dance—and asked me to marry him. It was very romantic and sudden. He was not rich, and my father refused. Then I used to drop notes to him from the balcony, and he used to give me the answers in church. It was very wrong, and very—amusing. At length my father died suddenly, and my mother let me marry him. I suppose to get rid of me. I was very troublesome. ” She told the story simply, pausing between the sentences, her eyes still fixed, as though she saw again the old days.

Yarrow worked quickly. In a few minutes he would have her sketched in, and it would be the best of all his attempts. “ And then? ”

“ Oh, we were happy for a time. I loved him as

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much as a child of seventeen is capable of loving. Then I found that I was beautiful, and I used to—*coquetter*. He was jealous, I suppose. I did torment him, poor fellow. He was young, too, and hadn't an idea how to manage me. There was no one in particular—I mean. I didn't fall in love with any one, but things grew worse and worse, and at last I went back to my mother. She wasn't at all glad to have me, poor soul."

She moved suddenly and Yarrow threw down the charcoal. "It was all a pity," he said, a little absently.

"Yes. I hope it hasn't harmed him in any way. It may have, of course. I mean if he wanted to marry any one else. Luckily I myself have never wanted to marry!" She rose and shoved the long pins afresh into the hair he had disarranged.

"I thought I'd tell you this—you have been so very kind and hospitable to me. Women living apart from their husbands are in an awkward position, but I have never been talked about, somehow."

Yarrow thought that he knew why. Admiration, like other things, can pall, and she must have had more than enough of it to suit her, for she was not at all vain.

"It is late, and I must go. Will you tell Lady Yarrow I am sorry she is not well?"

"Thanks, it is only a headache."

She put on her hat and long fur cape, and bade him good-bye. "I am dining here to-morrow, so *sans adieu*."

The corridor was still unlighted, and as she left the room a servant passed her, followed by a man in a long

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ulster, who drew aside as she approached. Bending her head in its big plumed hat, in acknowledgment of his courtesy, she swept by, to stop suddenly, clutching at the wall as he called, on reaching the room she had just left, "Borrow, dear old boy!"

She stood for a minute listening; then the door closed, and she went on. At the house door she met another man, who stopped as he caught sight of her face. "For God's sake," he cried, "what is wrong?"

She caught at his hand, steadied herself, and drew him with her into the night.

"My husband is in there," she whispered, "with Yarrow. You must see him and make him promise not to tell."

"Your husband!"

"Yes, yes; did you think I was a young miss?" she returned, impatiently. "Go. You must see him some way and make him promise."

"I don't understand," said Hardy, drawing his hand from hers. "Explain to me. What mustn't he tell? And why are you so agitated? There's nothing to be ashamed of in having a husband, is there?"

She drew away from him and leaned herself against a tree. "I've just been telling Yarrow a long story explaining—myself. Lies every word of it. Now, do you understand?"

Hardy stood immovable. "Lies. Why did you lie?"

She burst into a harsh laugh. "Are you an idiot? Because if I told him the truth, he'd have put me out, as

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—Woodvil did. *Now* do you see? Because I chose to have him, Yarrow, respect me. Because I— Now have you enough reasons? ”

“ I see. And I am to intercede for you, to save your name with these people, who are my friends? Why should I help you to deceive them; what are you to me? ”

“ ‘ What’s he to Hecuba? ’ ” she mocked, “ ‘ or Hecuba to him? ’ Bah! You have suffered. You have a remorse. You are unhappy. Be a man, not a coward.”

Hardy started as if she had struck him; but it was not the word coward that caused it. It was her quotation. Did she know? Could she know? He shook himself impatiently. He was a fool. Of course it was chance.

“ The room is full of the studies of you,” he said, at length. “ He will have recognized them. It is too late.”

In the gathering darkness she took him again by the hand. “ No. They have all but one been sent to London to be framed. And that one is on the easel—pushed aside. Let us look in at the window.”

Hand in hand they crossed the crisp cold grass to the side of the house. The shutters were still open, and swung round on its swivel towards the back of the chair, the portrait looked out at them. Facing them, too, stood the man who had come, looking down at the invisible Yarrow. A short, broad-shouldered man, with a handsome dark face, thin as though from a recent illness, one arm in a sling. He was talking; they could see the eager

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pleasure in his face; he used his one available hand in quick gesticulation.

“ That is your husband? ” Hardy asked, slowly.

“ Yes.”

“ And he doesn’t know you are here? ”

“ No.”

They were both silent for a few minutes, during which they watched the unconscious man, who was now walking slowly about the room, as he talked.

“ He does not look like a bad man,” Hardy said, at last.

“ He is *good*, I tell you! ”

“ You still love him? ”

She turned impatiently. “ What on earth is the matter with you? You talk like a madman. What has that to do with it? ”

Woodvil, in his tour about the room, had come before the portrait, and stood, his back to the watchers, in a sudden rigid stillness. In a few seconds he turned and they saw his face.

“ Now it is too late,” the woman whispered. “ He will tell. I shall be disgraced, and you do not care.”

“ He is not going to tell—yet. And you shall not be disgraced.”

Turning, he left her, standing alone. Her hands clasped tight she cowered under the tree. At last Hardy came into the room. She saw the introduction, the hand shake, the preliminary conversation. Then she saw the door open again and Lady Yarrow came in. The arrival had evidently been announced to her, for she showed

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only the conventional surprise necessary on such an occasion, and sitting down, the conversation became general and evidently agreeably animated. At length Woodvil looked at his watch, asked a question, and they all rose, Yarrow's long, lean hand appearing to the watching woman from the black mass that was his chair, and touching the bell by him.

They were going to dress for dinner. The servant who came in answer to the bell helped Yarrow from his chair. Woodvil watched with pain in his set face, and then, as Mary performed some trifling service for her husband, Rosalba Woodvil saw Hardy touch Woodvil and say a few words to him that elicited a look of inquiry ending in assent. He had done it.

Shivering with excitement she stood watching as they all left the room, her own face being the only one looking at her, and did not move until at last a housemaid came and closed the shutters; brutally, it seemed, shutting her out into the cold.

“ ‘ In the outer darkness,’ ” she said aloud, turning at last towards the avenue.

An hour later a village boy brought her a note.

“ He is going away to-night. He will not tell. H.”

CHAPTER XIII

MADAME PEREZ read the note several times, and then burned it. She knew the two men with whom she had to deal, and she knew, though one of them must hate her, and though she had made use of the other in a way that would probably be hard for him to forgive, they would both keep faith with her.

This curious trust in honorable men by women who are, themselves, quite unscrupulous, is a curious thing, but it exists, and it was hers. She drew a deep breath, and sitting down by the fire slowly warmed her hands, rubbing them softly over and around each other with a sense of comfort in the heat. It was nearly seven. In a few minutes they would be dining at Borrowdaile; Jacques Woodvil, her husband, would be sitting there between her friends, and for her sake, tacitly lying to them. A little pang smote her. She was sorry, for she knew his horror of deceit. It had caused much unnecessary trouble between them.

“A note, Madame—” She started and stared up at her maid with something like fear in her eyes. “A man from Borrowdaile is waiting for an answer, Madame.”

The long, gray envelope, with the white coronet was

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Lady Yarrow's, she knew, and her hands shook as she tore it open. It contained, however, only a few hurried words, asking her to dine with them at eight, quite informally, as an old friend of Lord Yarrow's had come unexpectedly, and they wished to spare him the horrors of a "family dinner."

An old friend of Lord Yarrow's! She smiled. It would be very amusing, and Jacques would keep his word.

"Tell the man to say I shall be very happy to come."

When the woman had gone she rose and taking up a small Empire mirror that lay on the table, looked at herself. "I shall wear black," she said, aloud, "and no jewels at all."

The only vanity she felt was that of being, in her splendid health, superior to all signs of the very real emotion she had in the last few hours been through. Without even drinking a glass of wine she dressed in the plain black, lusterless gown, and drove off in her snug brougham, resplendent in her brilliant beauty, and smiling in triumph at her strength of nerves.

A thaw had come after Christmas, but the last few days had been cold again, and to-night it was freezing hard under a bright moon. As the carriage went up the avenue she leaned forward and, looking out to the right, smiled at something she saw on the silvered lawn. It was a dark, irregular track leading to the space beneath the study windows—her and Hardy's footprints.

As she took off her cloak she noticed the maid who helped her watching her with such evident ecstatic ad-

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miration that half unconsciously she turned and looked at herself in the glass. The excitement, the love of the dramatic to be so amply satisfied in the next few minutes, had brought to her cheeks a splendid color that caused her intense pleasure.

“ I never looked so well,” she thought, and then, with a nod to the woman, went to the drawing-room.

Woodvil stood by Lady Yarrow in front of the fire. He looked very pale, she could see, and his arm was still in the sling, but he was evidently unprepared for seeing her, for he waited unmoved until Lady Yarrow introduced him to “ Madame Perez,” and then bowing low, murmured some conventional politeness that answered every purpose.

“ I think I saw you on your arrival,” she answered. “ You came late this afternoon ? ”

“ Yes. I only landed yesterday.”

“ From—” she had nearly said “ from South America,” but something in his face warned her, and she broke off short, turning her pause into an interrogatory one.

“ From Capetown.”

“ Mr. Woodvil has been in South Africa for two years, Madame Perez,” Yarrow informed her from the corner, where she had not seen him, and then dinner was announced. Mary Yarrow was grateful to her neighbor for helping her out. For many reasons a dinner *à trois* would have been very uncomfortable, and Madame Perez being a perfect stranger to Woodvil, would, she thought, make things easier.

It occurred to her as she watched Woodvil's ever recurring glances at his vis-à-vis that her design had been more of a success than she had expected. He spoke little directly to Madame Perez, but he seemed to be keenly conscious of her presence. Years ago he would not have noticed another woman when she, Mary Yarrow, was beside him, but evidently Time and Absence had done their work.

Lady Yarrow's devotion to her invalid husband was well known, and year by year it grew stronger and greater, while Woodvil had faded to a memory not altogether painful. His coming had been a shock to her, but chiefly in anticipating its effect on Yarrow. Glancing at Yarrow now, she smiled. He had felt no shock, it was plainly to be seen, but an agreeable one of pleasure. Mary shrugged her shoulders slightly. Had Yarrow known her better than she had herself? And Woodvil, too?

An oval looking glass hung opposite her, brilliantly lighted by small clusters of electric lights in the shape of roses. Looking past Yarrow, who was listening vaguely to some anecdote of the war told by his friend, she saw herself rising from behind a mass of delicate greenery. She wore white, with the Yarrow pearls around her long neck.

She was a handsome woman, somewhat pale, perhaps, and beside Madame Perez's magnificent proportions, a little too slight. She realized with relief that she had not gone off since the old days—those five days long ago, when she had learned to know Jacques Woodvil, and

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they had loved each other and said good-bye. It was rather absurd. The good-bye had been very tragic to them both, and here he was in her house calmly eating his dinner and flirting with another woman.

Yes, he certainly was flirting with Madame Perez.

“ Mr. Woodvil—” she began suddenly.

Madame Perez was a woman with a past, a woman who had lied when lying suited her, and who lived a life of selfishness.

Lady Yarrow was a woman of high principles, of absolute truthfulness, and of, in the one way that counts for a woman, a perfectly clean record.

Yet when Woodvil, responding to his hostess, turned to her, Lady Yarrow did something that the other woman, either from kindness or indolence, would have shrunk from. She opened her wide blue eyes at the man, holding his, and forcing him by the magnetism of her gaze, to realize something that he himself had hardly believed to be still true.

Woodvil did not start, and he betrayed himself only to her who had forced him to it, but when she had asked him some trifling question in which, with a smile, she included her husband, his appetite had gone, leaving him feeling a little giddy.

At length, dinner over, he had the chance of speaking to Madame Perez.

Yarrow, tired by the excitement, had gone into the study to rest for a few minutes, and Lady Yarrow was called out of the room by a telegram requiring an immediate answer.

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“ You must go away from this place,” Woodvil said, without preliminaries. “ I won’t have you deceiving them.”

“ You promised not to tell, and I shall stay. I am doing no harm—Jacques.”

“ That may be, but you are here under false pretenses.”

“ Those of being an honest woman, you mean.”

“ Yes,” he returned, doggedly, stirring a log with his foot.

“ Let me stay.”

“ No.”

It was characteristic that she took instinctively, after the first burst of defiance, the humble tone of Southern women towards their husbands. Also, that alone with him as she was, she made not the least effort to influence him by her beauty. There was humility in her voice but no cajolery.

“ Since then, Jacques, I have done nothing.”

“ Once is always. You are not fit to be in Lady Yarrow’s house.”

He was not a hard man, and had, since he had left her many years ago, often thought of her with pity. It is also possible that Lady Yarrow’s momentary relapse at dinner had, by reminding him so vividly of other days, made him more cruel than he would otherwise have been.

“ I am going to-night,” he went on, in Spanish. “ Your friend, the parson, is sending me a telegram—I can’t stay here now—and you must go, too. I will give you a week. Do you understand? ”

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“ If I don’t go? ”

“ Bah, you’ll go,” he answered, contemptuously, as Lady Yarrow came back.

“ We are besieged with telegrams this evening,” she said, laughing. “ Here’s one for you, and Borrow hopes you’ll come to him in half an hour.”

She had been full of repentance since dinner, and her vanity satisfied, determined never to do it again. Now, however, coming back to the drawing-room she found her guests talking together in a manner so engrossed, that what in old days had been her besetting temptation, stirred again.

“ Sing something,” Yarrow had said. And Yarrow’s room was out of earshot.

“ You are enjoying speaking Spanish,” she said, gently. “ I will not interrupt you. I will sing a little.” Crossing the long room to the piano she opened the keyboard, and sang.

Woodvil, surprised by what he felt to be her malice, could not understand. What had he done? He could not talk to his wife while she, Mary, was singing those songs. He rose abruptly and going to a window, parted the curtains and stood looking out.

Lady Yarrow had loved him once, but she did not love him now, or she could not have chosen those songs. When at last she began very softly “ The Night has a Thousand Eyes ” he left the room without a word.

Mary sang the song through without turning.

“ He is very impolite, Lord Yarrow’s friend,” observed Madame Perez.

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“ Yes. He is impolite.”

“ Borrowdaile,” Woodvil was saying just then, “ I’ve got to go. I thought I could stay, and God knows I wanted to see you, dear old man, but I can’t stand it.”

Yarrow looked up at him. “ Poor Jacques. Is it— still Mary? ”

“ Yes. It is still Mary.”

Yarrow held his two thin hands out to his friend.

“ Then go. It is hard that it should have been just *she*, but we can’t help it.”

The two men sat talking until towards dawn, and then, refusing a carriage, the younger walked off through the cold darkness to the station. He had not seen Lady Yarrow again, and he had not even thought of the other woman.

“ I was an ass to come,” he said, aloud, pausing to light his pipe. And after a second or so he added, “ I’ll accept that offer of Sim’s, after all.”

CHAPTER XIV

JANUARY passed, and Hardy did not see Madame Perez again. Humiliated by having unhesitatingly done her bidding that night at Borrowdaile, filled with anger and disgust with her, he had avoided her with great care, not even going to Borrowdaile. This avoidance was the easier for the reason that there was an epidemic of malignant measles in the group of fishermen's cottages that formed part of his parish, and in order to be of use to the fierce, sullen people who resented all help but his, he had arranged with Mr. Dudley to have the older man's curate take his services for a fortnight, and had gone to live at the Point for that time.

These people, called by their more respectable neighbors the Pointers, were not pleasant people. They were dirty, poverty-stricken and indolent; given to very bad language and worse behavior. From the first year of his Rectorship, however, Hardy had devoted himself peculiarly to them, and he knew that they were fond of him. There was possibly in the fact of his own poverty something that drew him nearer to them than if he had been rich and prosperous, and his unfailing readiness to do anything in his power to help them, had had its effect. There was a rough side to his tongue that applied without hesitation whenever he found it necessary,

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without deference to muscle or reputation, also pleased the dark-faced Pointers, and when the epidemic broke out, and Hardy came, with a small box, declaring his intention to stay and help fight it down, there were no cries of surprise betraying enthusiasm, but rather a murmur of satisfaction, as a community, at its own lack of astonishment, and a buzz of serene "I told you soism."

The Rector lodged with an old woman, voted by a gathering of prominent Pointers to be the cleanest in the place, and lived chiefly on bread and salted fish.

Tench gave him the necessary directions, he chose one or two women and a boy as his aids, and day after day, night after night, worked almost unremittingly, fighting the disease, and burying those who died in spite of his efforts.

He rose the cold mornings after his brief sleep, stiff and tired, to work until late at night bending over sick beds in filthy huts, full of evil smells, fighting not only the disease, but, in spite of his popularity as a man, much opposition as a nurse.

"What's houses built for if they're to be open like out of doors?" was a question which was triumphantly asked him on all sides, as he labored for fresh air. And his objection to the bad smells, while considered as perfectly proper if a trifle absurd, for a gentleman, was met with outspoken scorn when advanced as a plea for one of his patients.

"Mother don't mind the smells; she's used to 'em," he was told, with incontrovertible truth.

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But in spite of these and many other drawbacks and hardships it was not an unhappy time for the man. He was too busy to think, and his hampering moral personality with its aches and throbs was at rest. He had forgotten that he had a wound in his conscience, and the wound had ceased to bleed. The rare privilege was his of changing his pain, and it refreshed him as fully as most of us have at one time or other imagined it would us, could it be ours.

Gone his hours of struggle, his days of disgust, his sleepless nights of waking nightmare, the hard work of self-set task rested while it tired him, and he forgot himself in others.

One night in February as he was going home very late, he noticed something in the air. It was hardly to be called a fragrance, for there was a potent smell of fish at the Point that forbade rivalry in that line, and it was hardly a change of temperature, for Hardy shivered as he strode up the narrow street in his worn great-coat. There was a faint moon riding high, and tempted by the thought of the light on the water, he turned to the right down a narrow lane, and went to the little wharf.

The sea was quiet; asleep, it seemed, lapping softly against the flimsy pier. Hardy, fresh from the hot air of a sick room, took off his hat and stood looking with contented eyes out over the faintly silvered stretch of gray shadow.

“ ‘ The waters of the Lord, bless ye the Lord ! ’ ” he said, aloud. He was fond of the phrase.

He was tired and at peace. The memory of his

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trouble, self-created and self-inflicted, he realized, though without the power of ignoring them on that account, seemed insignificant and afar. The feeling of his unimportance, his smallness, the shortness of his life, came over him consolingly. For the time he was one with the sea, the moon, the Great Hush of God's Nature, and looked as It must, on the petty woes of petty man.

"God forgive me," he went on half aloud, "for my ingratitude. I have so much that others have not. I have the love of a good woman. I have, with God's help, saved souls for Him. I have given men to the nation. And my very suffering for that old sin is a blessing to me, as it shows me, in spite of it, not wholly bad."

He heard the strokes of his church clock vibrating as if half frozen in the still air. It was one o'clock. With a long look at the sea, he put on his hat and started inland. He had not been so near happiness for months, and accepted it gratefully, but unquestioningly as a child. It was not that he was doing his duty by his poor people; he did his outward duty always; it had become routine work, and exacted no self-command. It was not that anything had changed, for he knew that when he went back home he would find everything just as he had left it, if not a little the worse for his absence. Nor did he attribute his mental condition to any emotional cause, for he hardly knew himself to be emotional, and moreover it was by no means the first time that he had stood at a lonely hour watching the sea.

In spite of the man's morbidity, his introspection and exaggerated sensibility in many directions, there was in

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him a certain straightforward simplicity that led him to feel, without thinking it consciously, that his good mood came direct from the heart of God, as his bad ones did from the devil. Suddenly, as he neared the little house where he lodged, he stood still. The feeling in the air that had attracted his notice before grew stronger. What was it? With a little groan he recognized it. It was the feeling of spring.

The cold that still held was going to break up, and the first warm days were coming; the faint spring scents were coming; the first froth of green on the trees was coming; first primroses were coming. Spring, sweet, sad, disquieting time, was coming.

CHAPTER XV

EVERY day for a week Madame Perez expected a letter from Woodvil, enforcing his command to leave. She was a woman of much obstinacy and much daring, but she was too indolent to keep up a sustained resistance to a will stronger than her own. She knew that if he wrote her that she must leave Borrowdaile instantly, she would go. But she was more than comfortable where she was; she liked her neighbors, enjoyed the house she had made so characteristic of herself, and until she was obliged by a fresh command, would not move. If she had determined to create a scandal by claiming Woodvil for her husband, his wish and command would not have deterred her for an instant, her dramatic nerve being strongly developed; but there was nothing dramatic in doing what to every one but herself and him would be only what was expected. Staying on at Borrowdaile would in that case lose its charm of quiet comfort, and give no excitement in return. The game was decidedly not worth the candle, for after all her liking the place was merely a caprice, and was sure to die a natural death before long. If she went away now it would be but hastening by at most a few months an inevitable ultimate act of her own, and save her the

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trouble of fighting for something about which her feelings were very passive.

So she shut herself up at home for a week, reading a good many novels, yawning a good deal, and wondering why the expected peremptory letter did not come.

Lady Yarrow came to see her once, and brought her a message from her husband. "He has begun a new sketch of you, and sits and stares at it in the most melancholy way," Mary said, laughing. "Do come and let him work a little."

"Oh, yes. I will come, but—I may go away any day."

"Go away? Where? And why?"

Madame Perez laughed. "Why? 'Whence and whither, who knows?' Like all solitary people I am very capricious. I have no reason in particular, but I am beginning to want to move on. And then, I think I am beginning to want clothes. Probably I shall turn up in Paris before long."

Rather to her own surprise Lady Yarrow was sorry to hear this bit of news. Madame Perez had proved an agreeable neighbor, not given to over-much running in unannounced, yet always to be had when wanted, and her readiness to pose for the unsatiable Yarrow had never faltered.

"I shall miss you," Lady Yarrow said. "It has been very nice having you."

Madame Perez smiled at her. "Thanks. It is good of you to say so. I knew you would not mind me; I think I told you so; didn't I? I am too lazy to be very

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troublesome. By the way, has Lord Yarrow heard from his friend—the queer man who was so rude when you sang? ”

Mary shook her head. “ No. They never write often to each other, and doubtless Mr. Woodvil sailed for India Saturday. He had an offer to build a bridge somewhere in North India, and accepted it, Yarrow thinks. He is a civil engineer, you know.”

Madame Perez laughed. “ I should have said an uncivil one. I did not like him, Lord Yarrow’s friend.”

“ He is a very good sort, however, and was probably, Yarrow says, upset by the telegram that came from the firm who made him the offer about the bridge. He had to decide at once, and he had just got back to England.”

That afternoon Madame Perez went for a walk, and taking a steep path back of her house, came out on the downs. It was a gray, windy day, the sea being tossed into lumpy, lusterless waves that, breaking on the rocks, made a sullen noise.

As she walked, rather hampered by her long skirts and heavy furs, Madame Perez turned over in her mind the events of the last week, inspecting them carefully from many sides, a thing that gave her great pleasure. She wondered whether her husband really had sailed, and considered the probability of his sending her from India the order she only half dreaded. He had got quickly out of the galley as was his wont, and possibly distance would soften his resentment at her daring to come to Borrowdale under the false pretenses

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she herself had so crudely named. As she had told him she had only the one thing for which to reproach herself and as far as that was concerned, had done but little self-flagellating even for that. It seemed now that she was to be able to stop on at Liscom House, but—would she, after all? It was dull, and Yarrow was weaker, so that little by little he would be lost to her as a resource. Mary Yarrow she admired and liked, but they had nothing in common. Hardy she had frightened and probably disgusted by the blunt announcement of the situation between her and Woodvil. The mild amusement he had afforded her was over, and on the whole she would consider Paris in the near future.

She had passed the road leading to the church, which lay in a hollow, sheltered from the sea winds by a clump of distorted trees. Before her extended the gray downs; above her the sky, gray, too, and on her right the gray sea broke on the gray rocks.

Pausing she looked down at the breaking waves. A little shiver passed over her. "It is a gray life; a terrible, dull, futureless life, here," she thought, and her imagination flew off to sunny blue seas with yellow sands gleaming in the sun.

It was the last of January. Carnival was late that year. She could be in Nice in a week. The Raratoffs were there, the San Cirillos, the Herbert Motts— She turned on hearing footsteps, and came face to face with Hardy.

He started back as he saw her, and withdrawing to a distance of a few yards, hat in hand, said:

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“ How do you do, Madame—Mrs. Woodvil? ”

“ Madame Perez, if you please. Won't you shake hands with me? ”

“ No. I am in quarantine. I've come from the Point—that group of houses yonder. They have black measles there, and——”

“ And you are taking care of them. I know; Lady Yarrow told me. You are a very good man, Mr. Hardy.”

“ No. I am not a good man. I must go on. I have to be back early.”

She stopped him with a gesture. “ Not yet. You must let me thank you for—what you did for me that night.”

“ I don't want to be thanked.”

His surprise at meeting her there so far from her house, passing away, his manner was tinged by his dislike of her.

A slight smile came into her eyes as she watched him. “ Are you sure you stand there, so far away, for fear you might injure *me*? Is it not rather that you fear I might injure you? ”

“ In fear *you* might injure me? ” he repeated.

“ Yes. That I might corrupt your innocence.”

Hardy wineed. It was very disagreeable to him to have met her, and he had hoped to escape at once, with no specific reference to the last conversation. This, however, was evidently not to be.

“ I am not innocent,” he said, slowly. “ And I have no right to judge you.”

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Before speaking again she paused. Among her qualities was that one, essentially Spanish, of serene deliberation. Her face, so brilliant in coloring, could be very immobile, and in repose was absolutely quiet. He watched her with some curiosity as she visibly prepared her answer to his remark.

"You despise me," she said, at length, not as a question.

"No. I do not despise you. I pity you."

"Ah! I desire pity no more than I deserve scorn. What is pity but gentle scorn? We pity a fallen woman in the street, and—draw aside to let her pass. Mentally, now, you draw aside to let pass—me!"

Hardy could not deny the truth of what she said, and was silent. Before he could speak she had gone on, hastily, stung by his speechless acknowledgment.

"And for what are years, is Time, if not to cure? They say the whole body changes every seven years—why not, then—the soul? If I was bad then, I may be good now. And it *wasn't* so very bad. I loved him."

"That is no excuse," said Hardy, suddenly, with a stern frown, directed far more at himself than at her. "That is no excuse whatever. Good God, there *is* no excuse. It is done, and ended, forgotten by most people, but it is not for *you* to forget it. That is God's justice. One can not forget. It is unforgettable as it is unforgivable."

She stared at him in amazement. His face, thin and worn from his hard days and sleepless nights, was burning with a dull, red flush that seemed centered in his

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eyes; his voice shook with strong feeling utterly incomprehensible to the woman he was apparently denouncing.

In the old days Padre Ignacio had scolded her, prayed over her, admonished her, but that had been the voice of the Church, conscientious, measured, not unencouraging. This was a man who seemed personally to hate her for the sin she had so easily and so long ago forgiven herself. There was something in his voice that stirred in its vehemence, depths either long asleep, or never before existent, in her complicatedly simple nature.

“ ‘ Unforgettable and unforgivable, ’ ” she repeated, at length. “ You think that? ”

“ I know. And I know that in your breast you know it, too. That you lie awake at night seeing it over and over again, the first days, half innocent, the struggle, the ceding—then the despair. You can not forget. God help you. You *can not*. ”

The knowledge that these things were not, that she had for years hardly remembered what to her was become a mere unlucky incident of her youth, brought with it a new feeling that was curiously like shame. This man, in whose rough, rather unsympathetic goodness she believed, attributed to her feelings she had not. Therefore she was wanting; therefore she blushed.

“ You are very good, Mr. Hardy. But—you are hard. You ask—all that—because you can not understand. ” Forgetting his having come from the Point, she drew near, looking at him with eyes that glowed in the gloom.

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“ I am not hard. I *pity* you.”

“ You pity from a height, then. As Christ may have pitied.”

Hardy started, the red died from his face, leaving it white and stern.

“ Hush! Do not say that. I do not pity you in that way. I have no right to. I pity you with no Christ-like compassion, for—your sin is my sin, and—there is blood on my hands.”

His voice was harsh with the pain of telling this woman this thing. He knew it was an unnecessary humiliation, but his conscience, touched on the raw by her words, forced him to the agony of the avowal. When he had ceased speaking, he stood half unconscious for a second, until she laid her hand on his arm, her eyes full of tears of pity for him.

“ This, then, is your secret,” she said.

“ Yes.”

“ And you have told *me*. A woman whom you do not respect. Why? ”

“ Ah, why! I could not let you think me a good man.”

Without another word she turned and left him.

He had let her call herself a woman whom he did not respect, and on seeing his agony over his own old fall, she for the first time realized what she seemed to him, a man whom she *did* respect.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was raining softly the day Hardy came home after his quarantine. On a hill a man was plowing, and the smell of the damp, fresh-turned earth reached him; there was a film of green on the larches, other trees were bourgeoning, and in a hollow he found a primrose.

He stopped at one or two houses in the village, and was amused at the lack of approval his late doing met there.

Carbury hadn't had an epidemie since '71, and plainly looked on them as evidenees of a very low moral atmosphere.

It was also not pleasing to Carbury that old Mrs. Kite had been obliged to submit to burial by the Borrowdaile curate. In a word, Carbury regarded its Rector as having been gadding, and disappeared.

As he left the village behind him, Hardy met Lady Yarrow driving herself in a dog-cart, and turning, she insisted on taking him home.

"You've been catching it," Her Ladyship began at once, as he sat down beside her. "They've led poor Mr. Bates a dog's life, comparing his many failings to your correspondingly abundant virtues, but I knew that wouldn't prevent their having it in for you, too."

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“ Yes, they were rather short with me, most of ’em. But the Pointers are my people as much as the Carburyites, and the Pointers needed me the more. What could I do?”

Lady Yarrow turned, her eyes laughing under her wet sailor-hat. “ Do? Surely you only did what any sensible father of seven would have done at such a time! You fall short of your obvious duty only in not catching the measles and bringing it home to your children as a gift.”

Hardy was silent for a moment. “ You mean that it was far-fetched?” he asked in a slightly irritated voice.

“ Yes, I suppose I did mean that, among a few other things that I’ll not mention. But then, I am hopelessly commonplace, and if I have any wings at all they are too bedraggled in earth’s mud to be available for flights. Yarrow thought you quite sublime, but I confess my sympathies were with your wife.”

“ There are two sides to every question, and Abby was of course a little nervous—that was her share. Besides, measles are not dangerous—if properly nursed.”

“ Oh, but they are. Did you know that poor Madame Perez has them—it—and has been exceedingly ill?”

“ Madame Perez! ”

“ Yes. The doctor—she has Burroughs—sent for a London man, she was so bad, poor thing, and she may have to be in a dark room for weeks.”

Hardy stared without speaking at the brown, foam-

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ing waters rushing towards the little bridge they were passing. "How—did she catch it?" he said at length.

"She had no idea; she was perfectly well until one evening she dined with us, and had a chill after dinner. I've not seen her, as Yarrow has never had the measles, but I've seen the doctor, and he says it has been a quite unusually severe attack."

Hardy said nothing. It was of course extremely improbable that she could have caught the disease from him in the minutes she had stood by him in the open air, but the conviction had him nevertheless in its grip, and made him wretched. When he spoke again, it was to mutter a few conventional words about his being very sorry, and hoping Madame Perez would soon be quite well.

They reached the gate, sagging a little lower, he noticed, than when he had left, and thanking Mary, he went slowly up the muddy path, from where the gravel had long since mysteriously disappeared.

The children were waiting for him upstairs in the room in which he found his wife in bed, and the welcome was boisterous.

He kissed them all around, answered their questions, asked a few about their lessons, their games, etc., and then, as soon as possible, sent most of them out of the room and sat down by his wife's bed.

She had fallen and hurt her side a few days before, and the doctor made her stay in bed. The noise of the children had made her tired, and in a rather queru-

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lous way she told the little chronicle of the time of his absence.

Algy had nearly cut his hand off with his pocket knife; Harold had had the croup—she had written that—and MacDougall's throat had been bad again. The new baby, the "Little, little Baby," the other children called it, was very ailing—Katie had had her tooth out after days of wailing expectancy, but the ache had remained; she had learnt a very good kind of rice-pudding out of a housekeeping paper lent her by Miss Tench; she had been obliged to get a pair of shoes for Anna; mutton had gone up two pence, but eggs were a penny cheaper.

Hardy listened drearily. He was tired out and needed a rest, instead of which he had—this.

"Katie says the coals are nearly out," went on the thin voice from the crumpled pillows.

Hardy rose. "I'll order some," he said, bending and kissing her. "Are you glad to have me home again, dear?"

"Oh, yes, King. Of course I am. It did seem so useless, your going, though."

"By God's help it wasn't useless," he returned, unconsciously a little stern.

"Of course you helped *them*, but you may have brought it back with you, King!"

"The doctor said I could come, dear. I have been in quarantine, you know. Now I must go downstairs. Good-bye."

Katie had lit his lamp, and it was so warm that he

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needed no fire. All the misery of the little room seemed to rise up and cry out to him as he entered it.

There was to be beefsteak for dinner, he noticed, as the kitchen door opened. He wished with an almost frantic longing that he might once sit down to a meal the items of which he should not know beforehand. Staring at the torn rug, which had a new hole burned into it, he remembered the delicious, restful colors of the rug in the Red Room at Liscom House. Then the thought of Madame Perez came to add its note to his despair.

“Weak fool that I am!” he told himself, impatiently. Other men rose superior to their surroundings. He alone could not. Possibly he was going mad. He hated himself for his lack of will power. The reaction from his rather exalted mood had come, and he, the chip on the water, was tossed back to that rock from which the work at the Point had floated him.

“And now that poor woman is ill,” he thought, “and even that is my fault.”

He recalled her sudden movement of compassion, the tears in her eyes as she laid her hand on his arm when he had told her his secret. She had understood him; she had been sorry for him. They were fellow sinners. They needed each other. He had spoken harshly to her, flagellating himself by his words, but she could not know that, and yet she had forgiven him so gently. Even now, full of softened pity for her as he thought of her ill and alone, his rigid conscience did not attempt to condone her. She was a woman who had sinned, but

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she was a woman who pitied his hideous misery, and who was alone.

Suddenly the disgust of his surroundings and himself rose to such a height that he with difficulty restrained a cry. Terrified by this sign of his own weakness he caught up his hat and went out into the garden. Walking up and down the springy grass, disregarding the now fast-falling rain, he tried to force his mind into the state of comparative contentment that had been his of late. For he attributed all moods and caprices of memory to the mind. Of temperament he thought little. He was discontented with his lot, and even though he admitted that that lot was a hard one, he counted himself wicked in that he was not satisfied with it. His conscience, rigid as iron, waged war unending with his nervous, sensitive, half-starved temperament, and constantly lost battles through the very instability of its adversary.

There was a light in his wife's window. "Poor Abby!" he thought, forcing himself to a tender thought of her. Then he turned and, facing the other way, another light came to his sight. "*She* has no light, poor woman," his thoughts went rapidly on. "She is there in a darkened room, face to face with her past, smarting with my hard words."

Without really forming a plan to go to Liscom House he left the garden, and went down the hill. It rained very hard; the mud quashed under his feet, splashing his ankles. He did not notice it; moving was better than standing still, and the farther he could go, the better.

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The butler looked very much surprised when Hardy's ring brought him from his cozy quarters below stairs, to the door.

"Madame Perez is better, thank you, sir. Yes, it 'as been pretty bad, sir. She is h'up a little every day now, but—yes, no light is allowed in the room, sir."

Brooks smelt of hot buttered toast and tea. He looked warm and comfortable. Hardy left his compliments and best wishes for the invalid, and went back through the rain. As he passed the post-office the letter-carrier came out.

"Oh, Mr. Hardy," the man called out, and then gave him a letter. "I was just a-goin' up to the house, sir, but it's such a wet night I takes the liberty——"

Hardy took the letter and went on home. When he reached the study he put on his slippers and the dressing-gown and sat down at his table. The letter was wet, for he had forgotten to put it in his pocket. Pulling off the envelope, he drew the lamp towards him and read it.

His book was accepted, the publishers offering him a large sum down for the English rights, and a generous percentage on sale.

Sinking deep into the springless chair as if he had no spine, Hardy buried his face in his hands, tears trickling through his fingers.

CHAPTER XVII

A FEW days after the acceptance of his book Hardy was called downstairs from his wife's room by Katie. "It's a—a woman, sir," the girl told him, her bare floury arms rolled in her apron. "I don't know who she is, an' 'er H'English is something ridic'lous."

Hardy went into the study and found Amélie, Madame Perez's maid, standing by the window.

"A letter, sir," she began promptly. "Madame told me to give it only to you in person."

Hardy took the long, narrow envelope and opened it. "Tell Madame Perez that I will come," he said.

The woman gone, he sat down and read the note again. It was written in pencil in curiously large, straggling characters like those of a child, and merely said, without any formal beginning: "Will you come to see me this afternoon? I need help about my husband."

"R. P."

Hardy had been at home nearly a fortnight, and though he had twice inquired at her door for the sick woman he had not asked to see her, and beyond a few words from Mary Yarrow, whom he met in the village, had heard no news of her. Lady Yarrow, moreover, had not seen Madame Perez, so her news, such as it was,

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was second hand. The measles had taken their usual course, and the patient was progressing favorably except for her eyes, which seemed peculiarly sensitive to light, so that she was still in a darkened room.

Hardy had not lost his feeling of guilt about the illness, though he recognized its unreasonableness, and the *thought* of the poor woman shut up alone with her memories was very sore to him. But he had been unusually busy making up arrears of work and had also been away from home again. A few days after he had received the letter from the publishers in London, he had been called to the death-bed of his only relative, a maternal aunt, and as the old woman rallied after his arrival, only to sink again just as he was preparing to leave, he was away for five days, an absence during which his parochial duties again accumulated.

Mrs. Merrick, it was found on the opening of the will, had left her small fortune to Hardy, and he went home the richer by about £100 per annum. When he at length reached home he found his wife again ill, and to his relief she did not ask the amount of the legacy, merely turning her face away to hide the tears that rolled from her closed eyes.

“ May I have another maid, King? ” she asked, at length, when she could speak. “ You will see how much I could do with some one to help me.”

Hardy laid his hand on her hot forehead, pushing back the scanty hair tenderly. “ Yes, dear. You shall have a maid, and—we’ll begin by treating the children to a new pair of boots all round.”

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“ Anna needs flannel petticoats more, and poor MacDougall’s great-coat is a sight! ”

Hardy winced, but nodded. “ You shall choose yourself, dear. But one thing I am choosing for you—a new gown. It will have to be black, of course, but it shall be nice soft, hairy stuff, like—like a red one of Madame Percz——”

This was all a week in the past, now, and as he sat rereading the note, the new maid, under whose uncouth energy the house had already taken on a tidier air, was washing the dining-room windows. Hardy watched her red hand fly over the soapy glass with a feeling of delight. His study windows were to be washed next. The rug before the empty fireplace was darned, a rough surface of gray yarn that showed no great artistic talent on the part of the worker, but as he looked at it, his eyes filled with tears. Yesterday he had found Abby sitting on the floor, patiently working the needle in and out of the worn fabric, and he remembered the pride with which she had smiled up at him. He had noticed other little things, too; a patch in his dressing-gown; a new, particularly inconvenient arrangement of his few books; a new shade on his lamp. He was an observant man in some ways, and all these little indications touched him deeply.

Once there was a lemon-soufflé for dinner. “ This is delightful, Abby,” he exclaimed, warmly, meeting her expectant eyes. “ I am sure you made it yourself! ”

“ Yes, I did. I thought we could afford it for once, now—and you were always so fond of it.”

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One day he took the three elder boys to Sabley-on-Sea and fitted them out with cheap, ready-made clothes. When they came home he produced a box of chocolates and three bottles of cocoa-wine for his wife.

Not one, not even Tench, had dared mention his increase of income to him, and he was glad, for his book had brought him a big lump sum, which he was carefully spending, and questions as to the amount of the legacy, which was supposed to account for his entire increase of income, would have forced him to a direct lie.

He realized with grim amusement the inconsistency of his dread of this possible falsehood with the lie his life had become. One curious result of his suppressed life had been the slow development of a sense of humor that had been lacking in his earlier years. Between his attacks of remorse and self-loathing came days when he watched himself and his feelings with a strange detachment of sympathy, as if he had been another man.

The morning of Madame Perez's message was one of these times, and standing mentally aloof from his own personality, Hardy had been studying himself with an amusement that brought grim lines about his mouth and a rather unclerical light to his gray eyes. He saw his satisfaction in his wife's change, the improvement of the children and the state of his whole household, in something very near its real light. His selfish content mingling with the better happiness of seeing others happy, was perfectly plain to him, and also the care with which he cultivated the feelings that excused, to a certain extent, his position.

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As he walked up the avenue to Liscom House an hour later, his eyes rested on the pleasant evidence of spring on grass and bough, he smiled at himself as he had done many a time before.

“After all the mental pain that has been sent me as a discipline,” he told himself, “I am a good deal of a boy still.”

That he could see this was much, but he did not begin to realize the truth of his own words, as so often happens.

Madame Perez’s butler led him for the first time up the broad stairs, down a long corridor hung with very ugly Georgian portraits, and then, without knocking, opened a door to the left.

Hardy stood still for a second, trying to accustom his eyes to the darkness, and then, as the door closed behind him, took a step forward. As he did so, a soft hand slipped into his, and Madame Perez’s voice, broken by a little amused laugh, said: “Let me lead you—I am used to it, and you come from the sunlight.”

Presently he found himself sitting in a low chair, near the chaise-lounge, on which he could just make out the white figure of his hostess. The darkness, the unknown room, the memory of his last interview with her, kept him dumb for a few seconds, and then, awkwardly, he managed to find a few words of condolence for her illness and hopes for her speedy complete recovery.

She laughed, his embarrassment amusing her. “Ah, yes. It is—they are—how does one say? a very tiresome illness, but this with the eyes is the worst.”

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“ It must, indeed, be tiresome.”

She, used to the darkness, could see that he was sitting very stiffly erect in his low chair, his big, square shoulders outlined against the pale, golden plush. She watched him in silence for a few minutes, and then, jerking a pillow lower settled herself comfortably and began.

“ It is very kind of you to come, Mr. Hardy. I—I have several letters from—my husband and I am not allowed to read them. You, being the only person who—knows—must read and answer them for me.”

“ Is there no one else? ”

“ No. I have put off asking you, as I knew you’d hate doing it, but—they must be answered.”

He hesitated. They were both thinking of that last talk on the downs, he trying to find pity for her, she reading his mind with curious ease.

“ I know you despise me,” she went on, at length, a faint note of bitterness in her voice, “ but I think you will help me.”

He rose. “ Yes, I will help you. If you will give me the letters I will read them and come to-morrow, if it suits you, to tell you——”

“ No, no. Here they are. Go into the next room and read them, and tell me *now* what he says. Then you can answer at once. Paper and everything are ready there. Come, let me lead you.”

Again she slipped her smooth hand into his and led him across the room, the soft silk of her flowing gown rustling faintly as she walked. There was a delicate per-

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fume about her; he did not know what it was, but he liked it.

“ There is the door. Now please wait until I have turned.”

He obeyed her, and then, opening the door, went into the next room.

When he came back she was waiting for him, and, once more perfectly blind from the sudden transition from daylight to darkness, he followed helplessly. As he reached his chair he stumbled on her long gown and nearly fell. “ I have torn it! ” he cried, as she steadied him with both hands.

“ Never mind. Tell me. What does he say? ”

“ He says that—that you must go away from here.”

“ I know—I know—but is that all, in the three letters? ”

Hardy hesitated. “ It is the substance of all three, though the last two are—very peremptory. He had not known of your illness, of course——”

“ No. Where is he? ”

“ In London. Shall I write him that you have been ill? ”

She sank down among her pillows, and for a few minutes did not answer. Then he heard her laughing softly, as if under her breath.

“ He is such a—a prig! And it gives him such a satisfaction to make me obey! Well—please write that I refuse absolutely to go. That I like being here. That I have made friends and shall stay. How surprised he will be! ”

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“ I think you ought to obey him,” Hardy said, stiffly.

“ Of course you do. Do you not see that your thinking so is one thing that determines me not to?”

“ No. I don’t see that I have anything whatever to do with it.”

“ Oh, but you have! I have been shut up here so long; it has been so dull; I must have a little amusement now, and you amuse me! ” She clapped her hands softly together with a little tinkle of rings and bracelets.

It was a sudden freak; two minutes before she had had no intention of teasing him, but his uncompromising stiffness, his evidently unchanged opinion of her, goaded her into mischief.

“ If I amuse you—so much the better for you. But I am rather in a hurry. Kindly tell me what answer I am to write, Mrs. Woodvil.”

“ Very well. ‘ The good Samaritan writing for the poor sinner: Greetings to the nine-tailed Bashaw! The poor sinner refuses to obey; the nine-tailed Bashaw may—go hang! ’ ” She burst out laughing, as he rose angrily.

“ If you have nothing serious to tell me, you would have done better not to have sent for me,” he said, evenly. “ I am a busy man and have no time for——”

She rose, too, and stood looking at him.

“ No time for what? Is it quarreling, this? Or—trifling? ”

“ It is nonsense,” he said, roughly, “ and a kind for

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which I have no taste. You owe obedience to your husband. Obey him.”

Laying her hand on his arm, she answered, with a complete change of voice: “You are right. Forgive me. Will you write and tell him that—I will go as soon as the doctor allows me. And—I am sorry I was disagreeable—and I thank you for coming.”

He stooped and took up his hat. “I will write at once—this afternoon. I have an engagement now, and must go. Good-by.”

When he came out again into the sun, he stood a moment looking around him with wrinkled eyelids, and then, taking off the hat he had just put on, walked quickly down the spongy driveway. It had been a curious experience. She was a strange woman.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was a garden at Borrowdaile House that Lady Yarrow, on her arrival there as a bride, had at once appropriated as her very own. It was a walled garden, of course, for where is the charm of a garden in which one can not be alone, free from the curious eyes of the rest of the world?—and the wall was itself a thing of great beauty.

Built long ago of red sandstone, Time had softened and faded its hue to a mellow pink, crumbling the soft stone to a generous softness for the roots of moss and tiny plants; around the top of it ran a series of medallions, in each of which grinned or frowned a wonderful face, each one different, but all cleverly carved, and all grotesque. Over the faint arabesque of moss that crept over the rich surface of the wall, clung and swung festoons of roses, ivy and quaint old creepers for which the gardener had no name, but Lady Yarrow, then Lady Borrowdaile, on first discovering the faces had ruthlessly cut and bent away from them the encroaching tangle of branches, until now, after five years of time in which they had become accustomed to the new thralldom, they curled themselves like living picture frames about the grinning or frowning faces that looked like devils or satyrs crowned with beauty.

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The pride of the enclosure, however, was a giant jessamine that was planted to the left of the door leading from the house into it, and hung, splendid with scent and rich with a wealth of blossom over that door, and down on the blind wall high up which it had climbed. It had been brought home by the Lord Yarrow of Queen Anne's time, and there was a legend attached to it.

This young Yarrow, a few months after he had with his own hands planted the jessamine in the little walled garden, brought home his bride; and from the first time she stepped from the door into the sunlit enclosure at dusk, she, too, had loved the jessamine, and used to wear sprays of the starry blossoms in her hair.

Through the long warm evenings the two young people used to sit there, planning and hoping and loving each other. Then at last when winter had come and gone, and the jessamine was again in flower, Lord Yarrow used to come often alone, or with his lady leaning on his arm.

One evening they sat late under the stars, and she broke a long spray of the flowers and wove herself a crown out of them. The next morning Yarrow noticed a branch hanging dark and dank, as though frost-bitten. It was in summer, there had been no frost, but the branch was dead, and, calling a gardener, he had it cut away. That evening the little Lord Borrowdaile was born, and lived only a few hours.

Later the same thing happened again, and shortly after a new Yarrow came, bringing *his* bride. It was

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winter when her first child was born and died, and the jessamine was banked with straw and fir branches, but Lord Yarrow, who knew the story, already growing to be a superstition, uncovered it, and found, as he had half expected, a branch of it sapless and dead. When the son was born who carried on the name, the jessamine in full pride of its first bloom, waved living tendrils triumphantly, each leaf a glossy green—and so it went on.

Once, in the reign of the second George, a Yarrow, who had inherited from his mother a hot head and a lack of reflection, rooted the plant up and burned it in his rage at the death of his heir and his wife. When he came back from the Continent, years after, he found the jessamine flourishing again and full of flowers. He had failed in his intention of destroying it, and his nephew blessed its greenness on four occasions.

George, Lord Borrowdaile, had said nothing to his young wife of the legend, and did not even mention to her the existence of this little garden until she found it out by accident one day, and took immediate possession of it. It was on the side of the house that was shady in the summer afternoons, and the old trees just outside it deepened the shadow and thickened the dark grass which formed the middle, in the center of which stood an old sun-dial that had grown in the course of years to be quite useless after twelve noon. In the four corners grew masses of old-fashioned roses, and none of these things had been changed.

Lady Yarrow loved sitting in the shadow on a long chair, watching the sunlight fade from the wall, and the

shadows lengthen. When there was a wind she enjoyed the tossing of the trees outside and the quiet within.

And the jessamine was the joy of her heart, though her husband, giving no reason, had asked her not to wear the white blossoms as she had once done.

When the baby was born she was so ill that no one in the house thought of the jessamine, and it was only on the evening of the day when the poor little Borrowdaile died that Lord Yarrow wandered out into the garden, and, half-unconsciously, looked at it. He was not in the least a superstitious man, but at the sight of a long branch of jessamine hanging limp and dark he shivered slightly. It was, of course, mere chance, but it was undeniably uncanny, and—there in the darkened room lay his poor little son. As he stood in the dusk, holding the blighted branch in his hand, a scurrying, creeping noise behind him attracted his attention, and he turned to see the head and shoulders of one of the under-gardeners appearing over the wall.

“What are you after?” he asked sharply, as the man, having drawn himself to the top of the wall, paused for breath.

“Oh, my Lord!—I——”

Yarrow insisted.

“It was just, my Lord, to see if—if what they all says is true—about the jessamine—I am very sorry, my Lord——”

Yarrow called him down, and then in a few words told him to cut the dead branch away, and showed him how to pull down a blooming one to hide the scar.

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“ My son is dead, Hammond,” he said, gently, while the man worked, “ and the branch of jessamine is dead, too. It is quite impossible that the one fact should be the cause of the other, but—I want no talk about it. You understand? ”

“ Yes, my Lord.”

“ I have not scolded you for your—curiosity. You will do me the favor of not mentioning what you have seen. Now give me that, and go.”

The gate being locked, the man again sealed the wall, and Yarrow, going into the house, lit a fire in his study, and sat by it while the flames vanquished the dead branch.

Mary Yarrow had never heard the story. Years had passed since then, and one day now late in March Mr. Dudley, coming to see him, found Lord Yarrow in a wheel-chair, a plaid over his knees, a cap on his head.

“ Where on earth are you going, George? ” the old man asked. “ It is raw and cold outside.”

Yarrow looked up at him with a peculiarly sweet smile that seemed to begin in his hollow eyes.

“ Dear Uncle Charles, I am so happy to-day! ”

Mr. Dudley was conscious of a movement of impatient irritation. His heart was aching and throbbing at the changes in his nephew’s face, and his nephew had the cruelty to be happy.

Yarrow watched him for a minute, and then understood. Reaching out he took the Rector’s hand in both his and held it close. “ You remember the famous jes-

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samine? Well—I am going out to say a prayer to it. It must be very good to us this year.”

“Borrow!” Mr. Dudley dropped his hat and stepped on it unheeding.

“Yes. I am very happy, Uncle Charles. She only told me an hour ago. It seems too good to be true, and—I must placate that wretched jessamine.”

“I’d dig around its roots and look for worms if I were you. You surely don’t believe that rubbishy story?”

Yarrow laughed as the servant came in and prepared to wheel him into the corridor.

“It is rubbish, no doubt, but—I believe in it.”

The Rector picked up his hat and trotted over the marble floor beside the chair.

“So I do,” he admitted, “but don’t you ever give it away to Rebecca. She’d be most awfully indignant with me!”

In the garden, when the servant left the two men alone, it was sunny and still, though the tossing of the trees above the wall indicated that it was windy in less sheltered places. The grass was already very green, and near the sun-dial the crocuses shivered.

The jessamine, untouched all winter, had just been divested of its coverings, and clipped a little here and there. “It looks like a convict,” Yarrow said. “Isn’t it curious, the way it has been—going on—all these years? All the unlucky beggars who have seen it blighted in that way have taken good care to make a note of it—so I have documentary evidence of the truth of the

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story." He hesitated, and then in a low voice told the incident of his own discovery at the time of little Borrowdaile's birth and death.

The Rector listened in silence, his mobile face glowing with interest, his childlike blue eyes wet.

"Mary doesn't know, does she?"

"No. There was no use, and—ah, if only I can last till then. I have a feeling that only I can keep the villainous jessamine in order."

"Last till then? *Don't, Borrow!*"

Yarrow laughed gently. "Don't last? I probably shan't, dear old man. I'm getting steadily worse, though I don't think Mary has noticed. She mustn't, for it would distress her."

The Rector wiped his eyes. "Distress her! I should think it would. Are you sure things are so bad?"

Yarrow hesitated, his brown eyes resting lovingly on the old man's face. "Yes, I am sure. Only—you won't think me a muff for saying that I don't consider it very *bad?*"

"You never were a muff in your life."

A far-off gardener was whistling over his work; the two men paused and listened. "It's that young chap, Hammond, who is to marry little Alice," Yarrow went on, absently.

"Yes. She is a nice little lass. I hope they'll be happy."

Yarrow paused a minute and then went on, his thin hands loosely clasped on the plaid. "I mean that after

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all, my dying isn't such a very bad thing. I was born patient—it is a poor little ha'penny virtue, and probably given to me as a compensation for other things. At all events I've never done any very vigorous kicking, but I've been tired of it very often. And, of course, as I grow weaker I grow tireder. I look forward with great calm to—the last of it, Uncle Charles."

The Rector nodded. He could do no more.

"Mary has been an angel," continued the speaker, without looking at him. "I loved her for years before she would have me, but when she did at length make up her mind to put up with me, she did it in earnest. She has developed wonderfully in some ways."

"She loves you dearly, George," the Rector interrupted, suddenly, straightening up on his bench, and putting his handkerchief in his pocket with an air of decision.

"'Dearly!' She doesn't love me at all, you wicked old man, and you know it!" Yarrow smiled at him with perfect serenity as he spoke.

Under the wrinkles on the Rector's face crept a slow blush. He had lied, and he was caught. The two facts were too much for him. He sat like a culprit, his wet eyes raised appealingly.

"Mary is very fond of me; she likes me; we are, I think, absolutely in sympathy with each other; and she has been happy with me—in a way. But I may tell *you*, on an occasion such as this, that years ago she loved another man, and once is always with her. Now, I'm no

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hero, God knows, and if I'd been—as other men are—I'd have fought with that memory, and I'd have won. But I'm not as other men are, and there was no use. So I've taken what she could give, and God knows I've been grateful. She has made me very happy. Very." He broke off and reaching out, passed his hand absently across the mesh of jessamine branches near him.

"I'm telling you all this because some one ought to know. When I'm dead I hope—I *mean* this—I hope that the other man can manage—I should, in his place—he is married to a good-for-nothing woman and has every reason for divorcing her—he's a good sort, and my friend, and I want them to be happy. If the question ever should come up, Uncle Charles, she'll turn to you. Make them see that too much resignation is weakness. I've thought it all out, and I believe that the God who was the God of the Old Testament, likes people to help themselves. Likes a certain amount of—*fight*, in short!"

Charles Dudley sat in silence for a few minutes. The gardener's whistling grew nearer and passed; the stable clock struck twelve.

At length the old man rose. "Well, God bless you, Borrow. I understand, and I'll do my best. I quite agree with you. And—I am sure that you will be permitted to see your son."

Hurriedly shaking hands with his nephew he opened the door and went into the house. Yarrow sat for some time without moving.

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He was a very truthful man and had meant all that he said. It was not hard for him to contemplate the Death face to face with which he had stood most of his life. He was tired; and now—he looked at the leafless jessamine with a smile. “It must be a boy, you wretch!” he said, half aloud.

CHAPTER XIX

“ HE and Hecuba ” appeared early in April. It was a success. The kind of success that fills the papers with discussions as well as with criticisms. Some critics considered it a wonderful book ; others a mere temporary sensation. Anonymous, it was attributed to different authors, all of them men of note, and two of whom answered the accusation in a London paper. The one, an American, Anglicized by years of living in England, wrote with a sort of plaintive dignity, asking what he had ever written that laid him open to the charge of being guilty of “ ‘He and Hecuba,’ which, clever as it undoubtedly is, and pulsing with life, is so obviously a *first book?* ” Then, gently, with much kindness and a little mild sarcasm, he drew attention to the slight crudities of style of which he had never, even in his earliest efforts, been guilty.

Hardy, who had, through a curious, unexplained feeling of shrinking, arranged with his publishers to have the proofs corrected by them, knew nothing of this, a curious, unexplained scruple preventing him from reading the book notices in his one London paper. He had not seen the book itself, restrained by the same curious reluctance to bring himself again in touch with the old story.

He had written a book that had been bought at a

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remarkable price by one of the first publishers in London; the money had brought him comfort and ease; what the story was, he knew, for it was his own story, but how he had told it, in what vein, in what words, he had forgotten.

The other great man to whom the book was attributed was a west country man who had suddenly, a few years before, astonished the English-speaking world with a psychological novel which in keenness, ruthlessness, and knowledge of the world, was still unrivaled.

Hardy was too ignorant of contemporary literature to have appreciated to the full the compliment paid to him by the Day in attributing his work to the author of "Puppets," but he might have learned something of it in reading the dispute the question immediately raised, particularly when at length Henry Crawford himself stepped quietly into the arena, and in a short, pithy letter proved his ignorance but intense admiration of the man who had written "He and Hecuba."

One day he saw a copy of his book lying on a table at Borrowdaile House, but a fit of shyness prevented his even referring to it, and neither of the Yarrows mentioned it. The first edition was sold out in a fortnight, a new one came out at once, and in the papers the war still raged. Hardy's percentage on sale was large, and with the third edition he was to have an increase.

The sale in America was proportionately great, and the American papers devoted columns to the book, which was considered un-English in its vividness and fire, as well as a great study in psychology.

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Hardy's charities grew rapidly at this time; he gave new hymnals to the Sunday school, subscribed largely to the village charities, rebuilt a burned cottage at his own expense, and, in a word, gave with both hands of the money that came to him in checks larger than any he had seen for years. The pleasure he derived from this was very keen; keener, possibly, as it also somewhat healed his conscience, than that caused by the better condition of things at home.

He was curiously scrupulous, too, as to the increase of expenses in his household, something that he did not stop to analyze holding him back from giving to his wife and children more than what he had grown, in the light of bitter circumstances, to consider the necessities of life. His children wore ill-made, cheap clothes and coarse boots; his wife—although, manlike, he would have loved to deck her out in finery that would have been ill suited to her faded middle age—had but one new gown; the difference was that wholeness had taken the place of holes, sordid decency that of the horrible slovenliness that had been so unbearable.

As for himself, he had only some new surplices and a pair of boots. In the village, and in his parish work, he was even more unsparing of himself than ever.

Shortly after he had written to Woodvil telling him of Madame Perez's consent to leaving Borrowdaile, a fire had broken out at the Point, and Hardy, summoned in the night, was severely burned in his efforts to conquer it. His right hand and arm were useless for

a long time, causing him torturing pain and many sleepless nights. During the long hours he lay and thought of many things, wondering often why, with the writing of his book, his old terror and horror of the past had left him. It was as though, having confessed himself to the paper as he had been and as he had done, he had received absolution for his old sin. The knowledge and sorrow for it were, of course, still there, but he was their master, not their slave, as he had been for so many weary years.

In spite of his suffering with his burns, and the lack of repose caused by it, he looked better and younger than he had for months. The lines about his eyes and mouth were smoothed into the background, his eyes grew less somber. Mary Yarrow and Mr. Dudley, commenting on it, attributed the change to the legacy.

“ I wish she could come to life again, the old aunt,” Mary said, drawing her needle through the long slip of filmy batiste she was hemming, “ *just* long enough for me to thank her! ”

“ She must have been richer than any one thought,” the Rector returned. “ The Bishop knew her and he thought she was rather poor.”

“ Dear old thing, perhaps she was hoarding for the Hardys. Dear me, how he did ‘ jump on us ’ that day, didn’t he? ”

One warm, moist morning, when little wisps of mist hung over hollows in the wet earth, hiding early violets, Hardy hired the phaeton of the Borrowdaile Arms, and drove his wife to Sabley-on-Sea to buy a bonnet. The

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old one, she told him, in a little flutter of excited pleasure, was really quite *too* awful to wear with her new gown.

“ Yes, but you are to have another gown, too, my dear,” he said, gathering the reins and prodding the fat pony with the blunt whip. “ I want you to have a *gray* gown and a gray bonnet. The gown is to be made with fluffy—*hem*—flummadiddles down the front. Lady Yarrow has one made that way, and I like it.”

Her answer was a laugh with a sob in it. “ Oh, King, you are too good to me. I really don’t need it. Only last week the three pairs of stockings, and now a gown and a bonnet. You ought to get something for yourself! ”

“ Nonsense, Abby! My best coat is only six years old, and black always looks well enough. See how blue the sky is! ”

Once he got out and picked a bunch of violets for her, which she tucked into her gown with a flush of pleasure that tortured him keenly. It was years since she had been driving, and the gentle exercise delighted her and brought back to her thin face something of the humble beauty that had been hers long ago.

They bought the stuff for the gown after much debate, and, after leaving it at the dressmaker’s, where Hardy waited while his wife was being measured, went on to the shop where hats were sold.

“ This new shape is *very* becoming, ma’am,” the young woman told them, but Mrs. Hardy’s eyes filled with tears as she looked at herself in the glass.

“ No, I have grown too old,” she said, simply.
 “ Show me something else, please.”

At length they chose a small, flat, gray straw with a bunch of primroses on one side, and when it had been firmly pinned to her thin plaits, and a dotted veil drawn over her face, Mrs. Hardy turned to her husband with a faint blush.

“ Do I look nice, King? ” And Hardy, as he answered, felt his throat contract.

The fat pony once more coaxed into shambling motion, they drove slowly down the little street.

“ I—it is so silly—I feel as if every one we met were looking at me, King! ”

“ And so they are, my dear. It is—how many years since we’ve been here in—a wheeled thing! And that hat certainly is very becoming.”

He was thoroughly sincere. The change that a little happiness, and comparatively good food had brought about in her, seemed to him to be crowned that morning by the new hat and her pride in it. There was a light in her faded eyes, a glow on her cheek that seemed almost like beauty to him. As they passed Glegg’s shop, Hardy pulled up. Glegg stood by the door in his shirt sleeves; he was one of those people who are the first to perspire in the spring and to shiver in the autumn.

“ How do you do, Mr. Glegg? ” Mrs. Hardy said, taking up her little purse from her lap. “ Have you the latest ‘ Lady’s Pictorial? ’ ” She tried to look unconscious that it was the first time for years that she had bought a magazine.

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“Certainly, ma’am. One minute.” The little man bounded into his shop, and came back with his arms full of books and magazines. He had heard of the legacy.

“There’s the ‘Lady’s Pictorial,’ Mrs. Hardy, and there’s the ‘Queen,’ the ‘Strand,’ and the rest—and here’s the newest books, just down yesterday, the very latest publications.”

One by one he handed the books to Hardy, who passed them to his wife.

“Stanley Weyman’s newest and Gertrude Atherton’s—and there’s ‘He and Hecuba.’ That’s the book of the day. They say it’s by a member of the Royal Family.”

Mrs. Hardy’s thin lips quivered with excitement as she took the gaily bound volume. She opened it, read a few lines, and pushed it away with a little gesture of offended delicacy. “Oh, King,” she cried, “it’s horrid!”

Hardy laughed harshly. “A sign of the times, Abby. Come, choose your magazines and let us go on. Just put them down to me, Mr. Glegg.”

As they drove on, she stroked the cover of the top-most magazine gently.

“Isn’t it delightful to have a little money? I haven’t bought anything since Anna was born. Dear old Aunt Merriek, I—I hope she knows!”

Turning, he looked at her, the frown fading from his eyes, his lips shaking a little.

“Dear Abby!” he said, softly.

CHAPTER XX

ROSALBA PEREZ, as she called herself, sat in an arbor made of a very old and very carefully clipped yew-tree, eating chocolates. In the cool, green light she, in her white gown, looked very lovely and a little uncanny. Her heavy, bronze hair, unloosed, hung in regular waves to the ground over the back of her cane chair, and resting there on the soft moss, seemed to have caught in its meshes all the color in the world, leaving only a gloomy green for other things. The shadows in the folds of the beautiful woman's gown were green, the lights on her slightly hollowed cheek green, the hand with which, with a little silver gilt nipper, she carried the chocolate to her mouth, was also shaded with green.

And outside, she knew, there was an unusually bright sun for May in England, and every one but herself was enjoying, basking in, and talking about, that same sun.

She had come here out of pure contradictoriness, after a walk to Borrowdaile House, where she had found Lord Yarrow and Mary in the walled garden, fire-worshipping, like every one else. Yarrow, now too weak for any sustained effort, had, as usual, sketched her roughly in water colors as she sat, her hands clasped about her knees, chatting to them.

“ Water is no medium with which to paint you,

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most beauteous lady," he had said. "If I could dip my brush into sunlight and then into the color, perhaps I could get an idea of you."

The two women had laughed at him indulgently, Mary with tears in her eyes. She recognized, by his greater frankness of speech, that he felt the time of conventionality to be about over for him; that he was enjoying his privileges as a man almost dying, to say what he chose.

"You flatter," Madame Perez said, in answer. "I have grown thin and ugly since my illness. I was too long in that dark room; I am like a blanched potato shoot."

Lady Yarrow looked up curiously. "You *are* a little pale," she said. "Have you had any—worry?" She had never spoken so intimately to the other woman before, and the impulse came from a variety of reasons. Her prospective motherhood had greatly softened her, and her not to be denied prospective widowhood inclined her very tenderly towards those who loved her husband. Rosalba Perez was not a woman whom she would ever be really fond of, and she had never quite trusted her, but the sincerity of the South American's liking for and admiration of Lord Yarrow was very evident to her, and something about the woman's face to-day had moved her to pity.

"Have I—a worry? Yes. I have a worry, Lady Yarrow. Thank you for the way you said that."

Yarrow watched them dreamily. His wife, pale, with olive rings about her eyes, and a weary droop of

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her smooth head; the other with her splendid coloring softened a little to something more human than he had seen in her before, a slight fold between her level brows.

Mary Yarrow was a very good woman, he knew. He knew the best of her, and the worst, and had watched, since their marriage, the gradual unfolding of her character to the good influences he had brought to bear on her. He had seen her grow from a vain, coquettish girl with a sharp tongue, though a radically good heart, into a gentle, unselfish woman, hiding under a serene exterior an old wound that the man, in his great-mindedness, could realize without a pang, to be still existent. That woman was his wife, sewing, in the little sunny garden, on some tiny garment for her baby. Beside her the other woman, of whom he knew, in reality, nothing. She had told him her story, and though he had made no sign, he had not believed her. Her curious lack of vanity had, combined with her unusual beauty, interested him psychologically as well as artistically, and though he knew she had lied to him, he liked her.

King Hardy, a man who had sinned himself, had been unable to forgive her the sin she had herself confessed to him.

Yarrow, whose life had been almost irreproachable, understood by instinct something of what her past must have been, and though she had lied to him, sympathized with and forgave her. Her way of answering his wife's question had pleased him, and when, shortly afterwards, she rose and took leave of them, he said to Mary: "Dearest, never be hard on that woman."

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Mary looked up. "I know. *Am* I hard on her?"

"No. I don't want you to love her, but—don't be hard on her."

For a few minutes Lady Yarrow stitched in silence.

"Borrow—don't you think she is a strange creature?"

"Yes. Very. It is abnormal for any woman to have so little vanity."

"I didn't mean that. I meant that she—she must have what people call a story—a past. I wonder if her husband isn't alive."

"Yes. She told me so once."

"Ah! Men must have loved her, and she seems so undisciplined—so childish in some ways. I wonder whether she left her husband—with another man?"

Yarrow paused an instant before he answered. "I have thought so at times. But she is curiously lacking in sentiment—I should say, in spite of her beauty, that she is cold in temperament. Perhaps the lack we feel in her is rather owing to too little than to too much love."

Meanwhile, the object of their friendly discussion had walked home, changed her gown, and, bored by a remark of her maid about the beautiful sun, had gone to the yew-tree arbor, and was sitting in the green gloom, absently eating chocolates. Beside her, on a table fashioned on a low bough, lay a book and a couple of letters. The letters were both opened, one of them, indeed, having a date of the previous week. At length, without rising, she reached out and took them.

“ Why have you not obeyed me ? ” the earlier began, abruptly. “ I have let you do as you like for years, but you are still my wife, and I exact this act of obedience from you. Go at once. J. W.”

“ Still his wife ! If we were not Catholics I should have been ‘ his late wife ’ years ago—or his ex-wife.”

The other letter was larger, written in a tone of moderation but obviously the outcome of much self-control. She reread the last sentence several times. “ The rest of England and all the continent is open to you so far as I am concerned, but I will not have you at Borrowdaile. If I do not hear from you at once I will come. J. W.”

“ I wonder,” she said, aloud, as she put the letter slowly back into its envelope, “ why I am supposed to be *peculiarly dangerous* to Borrowdaile. He surely isn’t afraid that Yarrow will fall in love with me ? Poor Yarrow.”

The letter had come two or three days before, and was still unanswered. Hardy had written to Woodvil three weeks before, that Mrs. Woodvil would leave Borrowdaile as soon as the doctors allowed her to travel. A few days after the letter had gone she had been allowed to have a little light in her room, and within ten days had been in the garden with a green shade on her eyes. She had not seen Hardy since, but once, wandering at the edge of her small park, she had met Algy, his oldest son, and sent a message to him.

“ Tell your father,” she had told the boy, “ that I am going Wednesday.” The following day she had ex-

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pected Hardy to come and he had not come. She had heard from the Yarrows that he had been very busy at Easter, that his baby had died, and that his wife was unwell, but these things did not explain his not coming to say good-by to her. With all her lack of vanity she had come, through years of experience, to have a certain unexpressed, unanalyzed faith in the effects of her beauty on men, so that Hardy's evident unconsciousness of it irritated her, though she had only twice—and one of those two times in a perfectly dark room!—tried to use it as an active force against him. And now he did not come. He would let her go away without a word. Day after day she put off her departure, and now, as she lounged in the arbor, she had reached the pitch at which one knows that something must be going to happen. The very stillness of the May morning seemed to her the hush before some great event, and bored and discontented as she had been for weeks, she awaited the event with a smile. When it came she smiled on for a second, and then said, with a little wave of her hands, “How do you do! Won't you come in?”

Woodvil and Hardy, who had come up from opposite directions and stood facing each other, one at each side of her, stooped and entered the little enclosure.

“How do you do?” Woodvil held out his hand, and Hardy, frowning, gave him his. Then there was a short silence. “I have come,” Woodvil began presently, “to see why you do not go away from here as you promised. As Mr. Hardy knows all about it I may as well come to the point at once.”

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“ Mr. Hardy has evidently come to ask the same question,” she returned, carelessly.

“ Yes. I did. I came, too, to say good-by to you, which I will do at once and go,” Hardy went on.

He was too tall to stand upright in the low arbor, and stood bending his shoulders forward, his hat in his hand. Woodvil, half a head shorter and conspicuously graceful in his slight way, looked a boy beside him.

She looked at them for a minute, and then the old instinct to tease Hardy came back. About Woodvil it mattered less, and she did not try to resist punishing the other man in the way nearest at hand.

“ Don’t say good-by,” she said, smiling. “ It would be a great waste of time, because—I am not going.”

“ *Not going!*” The words were written in both their faces.

“ No. Not going. If you, Jacques, choose to tell people that I am your wife, I shall be—delighted to have you come and stay with me here. The house is very nice and there is plenty of room——”

“ You are crazy, Rosalba,” he said, a little roughly. Then, turning to Hardy, with a curious reliance on a friendship that was as yet purely potential, he went on: “ You had better go, Hardy. I must have this out with her.”

Hardy nodded. “ Yes. Good-by.”

As he backed out, Woodvil added, hastily, “ If you should see either of the Yarrows, please don’t mention having seen me. I go back by the twelve-three train and shan’t have time to look them up.” The bough fell

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with a little shimmer of lights and shadows and the two were alone.

“ I hope you will be reasonable and do as I—ask you—without further parley,” he said, in Spanish.

“ If you were reasonable you would not ask me to go. What harm do I do here? ”

He hesitated. “ I don’t say you are willingly doing harm. But you are living among my friends under false pretenses——”

“ Then tell your friends. Yarrow knows I am not a widow.”

“ There is no use in raking up dead and gone stories. I am quite willing to believe that you are—are doing no harm. God knows I am ready to believe the best. Even if—*that* had never happened, you and I couldn’t have lived together. That we are bound in this way is my fault; you were too young to know.”

She was silent, looking at him.

“ Please go away. I shall be very grateful to you. Yarrow’s my dearest friend—I can’t bear to have you—surely you understand.”

“ You mean that if he knew, he wouldn’t let his wife know me? ”

“ Partly that, yes,” he answered, gravely.

She rose, and twisting her hair slowly over one hand, fastened it with a big tortoise-shell comb.

“ I will not go,” she said. “ I like it here, and I like the Yarrows. I have never done anything—anything wrong since *then*, and I do no harm here. But I will tell Lord Yarrow, if you like, myself, and do as he says.”

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Woodvil started with a little exclamation. "No, no. You mustn't tell Yarrow!"

She looked at him with a certain softening in her eyes. "You are very fond of him, Jaques. Well, then, and that which will be much harder, I will tell *her*. She shall judge."

He turned white and did not answer at once. Then he said, slowly, weighing every word.

"No. There is no use in telling her. It would only worry her, and no English woman could answer anything that wouldn't hurt you. Stay, I have done my best, and I am beaten. Remember, though—" she turned and looked at him curiously—"you put me in a horrible position, and when Yarrow is dying and sends for me, as he will, you must not let me see you before—him. I couldn't keep up the comedy."

"It *isn't* a comedy," she said, holding out her hand. "It's the most real thing I have. I love Yarrow and I would love her, too, if—she would let me. Thanks, Jaques. I'll remember, and really, I'll do nothing to—complicate matters. I suppose there's no use in my offering you luncheon?"

Then she was alone. "I have fought and I have won—what?" she said aloud. "I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXI

“ CONSOMMÉ, roast beef, roast fowl, and vegetables, salad, pineapple ice, fruit, coffee.” The menu was pinned to the kitchen wall and every time Katie passed it she stopped and reread it slowly, aloud, her voice culminating in an expression of awe at the pineapple ice, and sinking, through fruit, back to commonplace coffee.

Hardy had made the list, cutting ruthlessly from the more elaborate one proposed by his wife. “ Timbales and such things are out of place in a house like ours,” he said, decidedly, “ and besides, Katie mustn’t have too much to do or she’ll muddle everything. We’ll have an ice from Sabley; it will save labor. You’ll have to look after the consommé. Mind it’s not *greasy*.”

Mrs. Hardy nodded, but without conviction. “ It’s a very plain dinner for a Bishop,” she returned.

“ So long as it’s *good*, the plainness doesn’t matter,” he returned, with a grim smile at the recollection of the last meal of which His Lordship had partaken under his roof. “ And have enough fowl for every one to have white meat. I don’t believe any one in the world really likes the dark.”

This was ten days ago, and now the great evening had come, and everything was ready; the pineapple ice

packed in a tub, stood—to the great excitement of the older children, who were dining in the kitchen, and *helping* the much irritated Katie—outside the door; the fruit, piled high in a glass dish and adorned with green leaves, was on the table; the four tiny coffee cups, relics of an old-time dozen, stood on a tray in the back hall. The fowls, beautifully browning, hissed in their gravy, and the kitchen smelt like Heaven.

The younger children were at the Tenches, but Algy, Anna, and Eustace were crowded into the hot little room, condemned by Katie—who, in a new print gown and white cap, was doing something amazing to little balls of potato scooped out that afternoon by Martha with a brand-new tin instrument—to silence.

“Mother looks perfectly *glorious*,” Anna volunteered, after a long pause. “Lady Yarrow sent her some roses, and she has a bunch pinned on her gown!”

“Mother’s all right, if you like,” commented Algy, reaching the chopped parsley humbly to Katie, “but have you seen father. Father is the handsomest chap in the county, I tell you *that*.”

The others were silent. It had never occurred to them that their dark-browed father was handsome, yet it seemed hardly filial to admit as much.

“He’s got on a new collar that shines like glass, and he’s *splendid*. I went into the study while you were looking at the table. Table!”

Anna laughed aloud at the tone of disgust in which the word was spoken. She was the cleverest of the children and had a sense of humor.

“ The table looks very pretty, Your Worship. There are roses in the middle, and new salt-cellars, and the best table-cloth. Our ferns are *lovely*, too, Algy; the fireplace is full of 'em.” As she spoke, the door opened and Mrs. Hardy came in, a nervous smile on her lips. “ Everything all right, Katie? ” she asked. “ Did Martha do the potatoes—oh, yes, *very* nice. Not *too* brown, Mr. Hardy says. And don't forget that the coffee must be jet-black, will you? It doesn't matter how much it takes for this once.”

Katie looked up. “ No, ma'am, I won't forget nothing. My fowls are *splendid*, and the soup's as free of grease as water. My, I knew them curls 'd be becoming! ” The faithful creature's eyes were full of the most respectful admiration, and Mrs. Hardy appreciated it.

“ I'm glad you think so, Katie,” she answered. “ Do you like my gown? ”

It was the gray gown, with the collar cut off for the occasion, a small triangle of stringy neck exposed, edged with a little scrap of lace. The curls, admired of Katie, had brought a feeling of heat to Hardy's eyes when he first saw them, they were so pitifully, obviously, the result of hot irons, and somehow so inappropriate to the high, shining brow under them. The roses, some of those sent by Lady Yarrow, were pinned to the flat corsage with an old gold arrow tipped with a topaz, that had belonged to Mrs. Hardy's mother, and was cleaned to a brassy brightness with soap and water. She was still talking to Katie, repeating some directions for the hun-

dreadth time, when the door-bell rang, and Katie untying the blue-cheek apron with one hand grabbed up her stiff white one and flew away, followed by her mistress.

It was the Bishop, rosy and dapper, who greeted her a minute later in the fern-filled drawing-room which she entered so rarely that she found herself furtively examining it during the ensuing conversation. The lace curtains, recently mended, were rigid with cleanliness and starch; the few books on the table lay with irremediable stiffness. They were books that could not look natural, somehow, and they all had gilt edges. The pictures, two or three old portraits and an old Venetian scene, were fairly good, and in ugly, good, old-fashioned frames. The carpet was rather dreadful, and the table cover a tinsel-embroidered horror, the gift of Miss Tench. But there were branches of apple-blossom in the ugly vases on the chimney-piece, roses on the table, and the fireplace was a mass of ferns. And it was her own drawing-room; the distinguished-looking man talking to the Bishop was her husband; the Bishop was her guest—and the simple dinner was going to be good. The poor woman's face softened and grew younger in her happy pride.

The other guest, Madame Perez, arrived on the stroke of eight, taking the Bishop quite by storm, she was so beautiful in her simple violet gown, a diamond star catching the lace at one side of her corsage. Mrs. Hardy was grateful to her for the simplicity of her gown; Hardy, without admitting it himself, for the diamond star.

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“ Am I late ? ” she asked, as she shook hands with her hostess. “ I am so sorry. My coachman is, I found on getting out, very drunk—*most* drunk, and had been under the impression that we were going to Borrowdaile House——”

“ These lanes are dangerous when one isn’t sure of one’s coachman,” the Bishop observed, when he had been introduced to her.

“ And then our lane is not much frequented by the like of Pratt,” Hardy observed, giving his arm to Madame Perez.

The Bishop noticed the lack in his voice of the bitterness which would have been in it a few months ago, and cast yet another benedictory thought to the shade of Mrs. Merriek.

The dinner was good, and His Lordship was hungry. Also, opposite him sat the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life, and he had already promised to lunch with her the following day. Hardy, who had not wished to introduce what he considered a discordant element into the little dinner, listened with amazement to the easy flow of words with which the usually silent woman led the conversation into channels easy to all. Once in a rush of his old jealous resentment, he thought savagely, “ She is taking pains to help us out,” and he abruptly changed the subject to that of cottage sanitation, which bored the Bishop and evoked a look of mild surprise from his wife. Ashamed of himself, he began at once on the former subject with a suddenness that was very noticeable.

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“ Have you read ‘ The Sky-Pilot ’ ? ” he said, charging headlong into His Lordship’s mild remarks as to Condyl’s Fluid.

“ ‘ The Sky-Pilot ’ ? No, I think not. I read few novels ; no time. But speaking of books again, have *you* read Canon Carr’s ‘ Defence of Queen Caroline ’ ? No ? A wonderful book, Hardy. The subject is a difficult one, eh ? And especially so for a clergyman. Well, the book is a poem. There isn’t one offensive word in it, though he goes to the bottom of the affair most impartially. ”

“ Ah ! ” said the Rector.

“ I gave it to my wife to read, ” went on His Lordship. “ It is delightful to come across such a book ; delightful. One of the worst features of this age is its tendency to nasty literature. ”

“ But surely English books are so very nice ? ” Madame Perez bent towards the speaker over the roses. The Bishop shook his head sorrowfully.

“ Dear lady, ten years ago English books were better than any others—it was safe to give nine out of ten unread into the hands of a young girl. Now—what with George Moore and the rest—bah ! ”

“ George Moore and the rest probably do not consider the possibility of giving books unread into the hands of a young girl, the end and aim of novel-writing, ” remarked Hardy, very much to his own surprise.

“ Have you read ‘ Garston Humphrey ’ ? ” asked His Lordship, drily.

“ No. ”

“ Or—oh, there are dozens of them. I don’t read

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'em, but my son-in-law does, and I know. I burned a book the other day, Madame Perez," he added, turning.

"Indeed?" She was peeling a peach, the jewels on her fingers, as Hardy watched them, flashing in the candle light.

"Yes. A book of which you have no doubt heard. It has created a great sensation. 'He and Hecuba,' it is called, and it is one of the worst books I ever looked into in my life. My wife is an old woman, but I burned the thing that it might not fall into her hands."

Hardy took up his claret and drained it deliberately.

"The man must have made a great deal of money by the thing," went on the Bishop, unconsciously, "for they tell me the sale has been enormous. The worst of it is—no wine, thanks—is that in spite of certain signs of its being a first book, there is great strength of an evil sort in the book. *Bah!*"

Hardy nodded. "Shocking," he mumbled, like a man without teeth. He was trying to recall what there was so outrageous in what he had written, but his memory was a blank.

"Such books are on our Index," Madame Perez observed, smiling. "It is so very useful, the Index—as a catalogue."

Smiling at her little joke, but with severity in his blue eyes, His Lordship went on: "I wish we had an Index in the Church of England; we need one nowadays; books like that are criminal in my eyes."

"What is the subject?"

Mrs. Hardy, who remembered having had the book in

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her hands in Sabley, the day of the drive, started as Madame Perez asked the question.

“ The subject—my dear lady—the Seventh Commandment. The *lesson* of the book, the folly of adhering to it. It is told, the story, in the first person, with a vividness of description, a baldness of phraseology that is perfectly appalling. It—it carries conviction with it, to a certain extent. It is, as one of the papers put it, ‘ a fragment torn by a ruthless hand from the fabric of life.’ ”

“ But your Lordship read it? ”

Up the Bishop’s rosy face crept a wave of deep red, so hot that it forced tears to his eyes. “ Yes. I read it, I am ashamed to say. In the first place, I have a scheme to which it more or less appertained, but chiefly, I fear, because—it interested me.”

Hardy burst into a short, hoarse laugh.

“ We must not let that fact go any further, my Lord. It might encourage the man to write another book! ”

Madame Perez dipped her slim fingers into her finger-glass and shook the water daintily from them. Her eyes were fixed on Hardy, and as they rose from the table he met her gaze. There was in the short space before she turned away, an accusation, a defiance, and a mutual challenge.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next day, as Hardy went through the village from Borrowdaile House, he was overtaken by Madame Perez in her pony-cart.

Stopping him with a little, peremptory motion of her whip, she gave the reins to the groom, and taking up a package that lay beside her, tried to open it. The string was stout, however, and did not break. Hardy took it from her, broke the string with a wrench of his strong hand and gave it back to her.

“ I’ve been to Sabley-on-Sea,” she said, holding the unopened package and smiling at him, the sun glinting in her brown eyes. “ Can you guess for what I went? ”

“ No.”

“ Get in and I’ll drive you home.”

“ Thanks, I am not homeward bound. I have several visits to make. A beautiful day, isn’t it? ”

“ Very beautiful. *Una bellissima giornata.*”

He started nervously. He had not slept, and was, she saw, a little pale.

“ You speak Italian? ” he asked, calmly enough.

“ Yes. Well, as you will not come with me, I will not detain you. I have something for you—a little—souvenir of our delightful evening yesterday.” With

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a warning glance at the groom she drew the paper from her package, and showed him two books bound in red, with black arabesques on the cover.

“ It is the book the Bishop spoke of—‘ He and Hecuba.’ I went to get it for myself, and it occurred to me that you might like a copy, too. I understood you to say that you had not read it? ”

Hardy felt the ground slipping from under his feet, the little village street with its low-browed cottages looked misty and strange to him.

“ I did not say I had not read it,” he answered, after a pause, during which the possibility of his answering, “ I have seen the book, but not opened it,” slid, rejected, through his mind.

Madame Perez, her face glowing with delighted mischief, watched him while he spoke.

“ Ah, I was mistaken, then. At all events read it, and the next time I see you we can talk it over—if it *bears* talking over, which, according to your dear little Bishop, seems unlikely! Of course, a Bishop is bound to be strait-laced, but even the papers rather objected to some of it. Of course, you have read the criticisms? ”

Hardy took the book and slid it into his pocket. “ No, I have seen no criticisms,” he answered, quietly. “ I rarely see newspapers, and almost never read book notices. Thanks, very much; good-by.”

Turning abruptly he swung down the street, splashing unheeding through a puddle of water, hissed after by some geese, curtsied to by a couple of children.

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Madame Perez watched him with a smile. She had been sure the evening before; now she knew what "doubly sure" meant.

Hardy interested her more and more the longer she knew him; he appealed at once to the best and to a certain gamin-like love of teasing that was in her. She was a little afraid of him, could laugh at some of his qualities, she respected, pitied, and admired him all at once, and this combination of sensations that he gave her pleased her in its unusualness. The polite aloofness with which he treated her, his evident disregard of her beauty, the Hebraic way in which he viewed her position, as a woman who had sinned, had, however, hitherto prevented her feeling herself really drawn to like him humanly. Something was lacking, she had not troubled herself about what it was, but he was too remote, too good, in spite of his confession to her, for her to have more than a mental feeling for him. Last night, the Bishop's description of the book, which already interested her through criticisms she had read of it, had given her a little thrill of curiosity. The man who had written it had lived, and knew, according to both the clerical and the newspaper critics, what he was writing about.

The phrase "a fragment torn by a ruthless hand from the fabric of life," had caught her fancy. She would read the book; it might be a bad one, but that, of course, made no difference, and it was real and vivid and full of heart-beats.

Looking around the little table as she listened to the

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Bishop, she thought with amusement of the contrast the author of the book would afford to the two good, narrow, conscientious men before her.

Then, as she roused herself at the signal for departure, she had glanced at Hardy, and something in his set, dark face told her that *he* and no other had written "He and Hecuba."

Without speaking, she accused him; without speaking, he neither admitted nor denied; he defied.

During her half hour's tête-à-tête with Mrs. Hardy, talking of measles and garden flowers, butchers and embroidery, her busy brain was working, and though she did not again, in the course of the evening, look at Hardy otherwise than in the most casual way, she knew.

For the first time for years she was excited. It was so unusual, so utterly unexpected. It was hardly credible and yet it was true.

Of course she considered the possibility of the Bishop's having exaggerated the unconventionality and the reality of the book, but, curiously clinging to the hope of its being something startling, she recalled, as she lay awake in her big, dusky room, several of the more severe criticism that she had read. She wanted an interest in life, a real, living interest, and if King Hardy, the man whose asceticism and unselfish zeal in his work had repulsed her emotionally, while it attracted her intellectual admiration, had written this novel of which every one was talking, that sensation would be hers! And now as she sat in the pony-cart, she congratulated herself warmly.

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The interest, the sensation *were* hers.

“ There’s some cows comin’ behind us, Madame,” the groom’s voice recalled her to herself. Her ponies disliked cows, and taking the reins she drove briskly up the street away from them.

She had intended going around the shady way to see Mary Yarrow, but the book beside her held too keen an interest to be put aside.

In a few minutes she sat again in the yew arbor, which had become a favorite lounging-place of hers, and with a big silver paper-cutter slashed open the thick ribbed pages of “He and Hecuba.” “Luncheon is served, Madame.” The butler stood in a jagged spot of sunshine, holding back a low branch.

“ I will come presently.” She did not look up, and turned the page as she spoke.

The cook, who had a temper, gave the scullery maid a particularly bad quarter of an hour while the luncheon shriveled and browned and no one came to eat it. An hour passed; the cook was alone, the scullery maid being in the drying ground, accepting consolation from an under-gardener; the butler slept in his pantry.

Then Madame Perez rang, ordered a chop and a glass of claret, and while she waited turned over again the pages of the book she had just read. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes were bright.

Hardy could play the saint, nurse measles patients, burn himself up in village fires, and wear old clothes as much as he liked. He could confess himself a sinner, could treat other sinners with cold apartness as much as

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he liked; he could, in a word, do everything he liked to prove himself to be that which he was *not*.

She knew now what he was. She knew the possibilities that lay in him; she knew, as she put it, from his "had beens," his "could bes." She recalled him as he was physically; big, strongly built, dark, with the square back to his head, the curly, grizzled hair, the deep-set eyes—the strength of his lean hands. She opened the book at the one place where the teller of the story spoke of himself.

"I love you," the woman had said to him, "because you are big and strong and have blood in your veins." That that had been said to King Hardy Madame Perez knew with absolute certainty. And it threw a strange, new light over the man's personality. It had been said years before, but was essentially true even to-day; he was still big and strong, that she had known. What she had not known, though she now realized that she must owe her interest in him to the fact of her unconsciously feeling it, was that he had what she would call blood in his veins.

That he had written such a book was astonishing enough to interest any one; that he should have written it as he had, from a view-point so diametrically opposed to the basis on which he had built his later life, was what brought to her the tingling of impatience to see him, to "have it out with him."

The dramatic side of her had been in abeyance for months; the quiet life among the people she liked, and

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who were so kind to her, had brought to the surface most of the good in her nature, leaving the bad passive.

She was not an actively, wilfully bad woman; indeed, there are in the world comparatively few such; she belonged to the great class of women who are passively unprincipled in small things while they believe themselves, and are, for a time, careful in great things. When the crisis comes to such a woman it finds her, of course, unprepared for resistance, and usually sweeps her away into depths never contemplated by her.

Rosalba Perez had never traded on her beauty as an attraction to men; used from very early girlhood to sudden prostrate adorations, they had, in losing their novelty, lost all charm.

The average man had no interest for her, though she was capable of strong likings, as in Lord Yarrow's case. Often she had liked a man, admired and respected him, to be interrupted in her friendship by an abrupt declaration of love or unmistakable signs of the coming of such a declaration, that destroyed instantly the slightest interest in the unlucky creature who had proved too weak to withstand her beauty.

Rich, she had traveled, amused herself after the fashion, and taken, as a rule, each day as it came, with a sort of stolid serenity. Since her separation from her husband she had never met a man who caused her to wish herself free, and at last, giving up the "companions" she had long taken around with her, she had determined to live the rest of her life in peace and allow

herself to be bored no longer with those most uninteresting specimens of humanity who are, as a rule, the only ones who are inspired to offer themselves as company to young women in her position.

She had known King Hardy for months, seen him often, and never seriously thought of him as a possible distraction until she read that book, showing him in a light so strongly at variance with the exterior he showed the world.

But now, as she studied isolated bits of the story, and flushed with the sincerity of it, the desire, inevitable in a woman of her stamp, to get behind the mask and see the real man, took possession of her.

She had no plan for making him fall in love with her; her idea was to interest herself; to use the unexpected medium of entertainment to its fullest extent. A few minutes after she had finished her luncheon, a groom was riding up the hill with a note for Hardy.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. HARDY was in the garden, kneeling on the grass, and prodding about the roots of a young climbing-rose with a pointed stiek. She had no talent for gardening, and often, in her ignorant zeal, injured the plants she wished to help. Katie, who had "the lucky hand," as she herself called it, could stuff seeds into the ground with her thumb, sprinkle earth over them, and in the shortest possible time up the shoots would come, strong and flourishing. Mrs. Hardy recognized the difference between the result of her labor and that of the girl, with plaintive wonder, and now that she had a few extra shillings to spend in beautifying the shabby little garden, she had planned a radical change in its appearance, and with the help of a book on gardening that took for granted a practically unlimited expenditure, had begun the day before on her campaign. Algy was helping her and a man from the Point had been busy all the morning wheeling away barrows of earth and turf, for several new flower-beds were in the plan.

It was a warm day in late June, the sun shone brightly on the dark, upturned earth and flower-speckled length of grass, drawing a strong hot scent from the straggling gilly-flowers that were the only floral relics of former years.

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Algy, in his shirt-sleeves, was resting, seated on the low wall, fanning himself with his hat; the Pointer was gone for the minute.

Mrs. Hardy dug energetically at the lumpy earth, her thin figure in its dark print gown bent almost to the ground, her thin hair hanging in wisps, curly at the ends, about her reddened face.

“ It looks to me, mother,” the boy began at length, glancing at the great plots of bare earth around him, “ as if we have ‘ bit off rather more than we can chew. ’ ”

“ Oh, Algy, what a horrid expression ! ”

“ Ameriean. I heard Tench use it to father. I mean that, after all, the end of June is late to be planting flowers. And then we’ve made such a lot of beds. Those seeds won’t begin to fill ’em up ! ”

His mother turned, tears of nervous vexation in her eyes. “ Do you think so ? The book said to do it that way, and your father said I might try. The effect of the solid masses of color is so good at Liscom House. ”

He laughed. “ Oh, Liscom House. Those things weren’t set out as seeds ! They were half grown in the green-house first. There are four gardeners there, too. ”

“ If you are tired, dear,” she began, but he jumped down from the wall and took up his spade with energy. “ *I’m* not tired, only it’s hot. You look tired, though. Let’s stop when that one bed is cut straight. We can’t plant things in this heat, anyhow. ”

Mrs. Hardy rose. “ I know. Well—dear *me*, I am

stiff. Of course those plants at Liscom aren't seedlings. And of course ours won't be like them, only—it would be so nice to have the garden a little pretty, wouldn't it? ”

The boy nodded. “ I wish our yew could be clipped. That arbor where she reads is *stunning*. ”

“ Where *who* reads? ” asked his mother, absently looking at a man riding up the hill.

“ Madame Perez. The tree is bent over, the boughs, and clipped into a little house. She has a chair in it, and there's a table on one of the branches. It's a ripping place. ”

“ He's coming here, Algy—run to the path—it's a note, ” she interrupted, pulling down her sleeves instinctively. The boy came running up the path, carrying the note gingerly in his earthy hands.

“ It's for father, from *her*. ‘ Speaking of angels, ’ eh? Shall I take it in? The man is waiting for an answer. ”

Mrs. Hardy took it, and instead of entering the house went to the window on the right of the door, and pushed it open. “ King! ” she called.

Hardy came to the window, a pipe in his mouth. “ What is it? ”

She gave him the note. “ From Madame Perez; the groom is waiting. What pretty paper, King! ” He tore it open and read it hastily.

“ What does she say? ”

“ I must send an answer, ” he returned, withdrawing into the room. As he did so his sleeve caught in the cur-

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tain, the note fell from his hand, and after fluttering for a minute over the window sill, dropped to her feet.

Stooping, she picked it up. "What a dear little monogram! Gray paper is very smart now. I read it in the 'Queen' only yesterday.

"Give it me," he said, holding out his hand.

"Mayn't I read it? It's such a curious hand——"

"Give it me, Abby," he repeated in a repressed voice that caused her to look up from her inspection of the stationery. He was frowning fiercely, his invisible mouth, she knew by the lines near it, tightly closed.

"Why, King," she faltered, obeying him instantly, "I didn't mean to annoy you."

Tearing the letter across he crumpled it up, and, stuffing it in his pocket, came out into the sunlight.

"Algy, tell the man I say 'very well.' That will do."

Then, as the boy left them, he went on quickly, taking his wife's hand: "I beg your pardon, my dear, for being so—fierce."

"Oh, never mind. I really wasn't curious—I mean—about what she *wrote*. Only the paper was so pretty, and the writing so queer. I suppose you thought I was ill-bred?"

"No," he answered, truthfully, "I didn't want you to read the note, that was all."

"I know, I know. I have never been curious about your private business, have I? Of course, a clergyman has parish business and confidences made him."

He watched her and saw that, though she spoke

bravely, a little demon of suspicion had sprung from the incident. The demon, he knew, could be consigned to everlasting oblivion by a word from him now. At length he spoke. "This has nothing to do with parish work, Abby, and nothing to do with a 'confidence' made in me. It was merely a note asking me to come and see her this afternoon."

The demon grew to full proportion as he spoke; she was over-tired and warm; her garden projects seemed suddenly utterly impracticable; tears came to her eyes.

"Are you going to the yew-arbor?" she asked hopelessly.

He started. "The yew-arbor? What on earth do you know about the yew-arbor?" he asked, in surprise.

"Algy told me. It must be lovely there; so *cool*. And I am so tired and hot and—*old*."

The last word was almost a break-down, and filled him with compunction for his unnecessary frankness. For after all his frankness had been merely nominal. He had no reason for concealing from his wife his project of drinking a cup of tea with Madame Perez; and his reason for destroying the note was that in it she had made a reference to the book, and he could not tell Abby that he purposed, however much against his will, talking the book over with the woman who, with her, had heard the Bishop's condemnation of it.

But it was impossible to explain without lying, and though he was letting her suffer the pangs of a perfectly unnecessary jealousy, his conscience, while it allowed him the falsehood, kept him dumb on the subject.

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“ Poor girl, you are done up,” he said, gently, putting his arm about her thin shoulders, and leading her into the house. “ You must lie down for a while, and I’ll have Katie make you a cup of tea. Shall I? ”

“ Oh, King! Come and sit with me, will you? I—I don’t feel well.” Her implicit faith in him could not be shaken by such a trifle, but she was profoundly troubled and too awkward to do any of the innocent pumping another woman might have resorted to. She put on a dressing-gown and lay down on the bed, while he, still stung by a remorse which the poor soul recognized, and naturally attributed to a false source, sat by her and told her all the little scraps of news that he could recall.

The Tenches had a new stair carpet; red. Molly Kitterick’s baby had an inflammation of the eyes that threatened blindness; the Cricket Club Tea was to be the following Tuesday; Lord Yarrow was very weak—they could only hope that he would live to see his baby.

At length, when he rose, she gathered her courage together and said: “ Remember me to Madame Perez, King, and tell her not to forget her promise to come to tea some time.” It was a great effort and he appreciated it.

“ I’ll tell her, dear. I’m sorry I can’t explain about the note, but I can’t.” He kissed her kindly and went his way—to the yew-arbor, as she had guessed.

He had not yet read his book; a pile of letters and papers having awaited him on his return home, and a

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half-finished sermon for the next day claiming the rest of his time, rather to his satisfaction, for he did not care to analyze his reluctancy to read what he had written.

When he drew back the bough that served as door to the arbor, and entered its cool gloom, Madame Perez looked up and held out her left hand to him.

“How do you do, Herbert Branseombe,” she said, lazily.

“Then you do know.” He let the branch fall to its place, shutting him in with this woman who knew his secret, in whose hands lay his honor before the world, and whom he began to fear.

“Yes, I know. And I wonder if *you* know what a wonderful man you are?”

“I? A wonderful man? No. I certainly do not know that.” He sat down on the one vacant chair and dropped his hat to the ground.

“But that is what you are. You have not only lived a tragedy, but you have known how to make other people, in reading your book, live it, too!”

He did not answer. The feeling of helplessness, of being in a prison with one who was going to be his torturer, grew stronger. The smell of the pines by which they were surrounded was heavy in the late afternoon sun; a bird outside sang discordantly; the burring noise of a lawn-mower reached his ears.

Madame Perez sat leaning back, her half-bare arms resting on the arms of the chair shining white in the strange light, her hands quietly clasped under her chin.

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“ It is too bad,” she went on, slowly, after a pause, “ that you published anonymously.”

“ I could do nothing else,” he returned, stiffly.

She laughed. “ Oh, yes. The book, as a book, is great enough to bear abuse. They will soon forget the parts they—disapprove, and remember only the greatness of it. You, even as a priest, could have lived it down.”

“ It is not a great book. And it seems to be one that no clergyman had a right to publish——”

She caught the peculiarity of his phrasing. “ ‘ It seems to be.’ What do you mean? You ought to have your own opinion about it.”

“ You have no right to catechize me, Madame—Mrs. Woodvil, but as long as you have guessed, I will tell you, before we close the subject for good, that I have no opinion about the book’s harmfulness, because I have—forgotten it.”

“ Forgotten it! ” Her hands dropped, and she half rose in her surprise.

“ Yes. I—of course I remember the *story*, but I have forgotten *how* I told it, and that seems to be its chief cause of complaint. When I finished it—that night after the dinner at the Yarrows, I was not in a condition to know quite what I wrote—I mean,” he corrected himself, “ I was *drunk*. Then——”

“ Then? ” she repeated, breathlessly.

“ Then, I have not tried to recall it. It is too—painful to me.”

“ I see.”

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After a pause, he said, slowly. "You have read it; what do you think of it?"

"I told you. It is—wonderful."

"Yes, but—the Bishop was very severe. Is it—as bad as that?" His eyes were fixed eagerly on hers; he had gripped his hands tight about his knee; she saw the knuckles whiten.

"Of course my point of view is not the same as the Bishop's," she answered, "and—what value can *my* opinion have for you?" Her voice changed to one of bitterness as she spoke. "You have not spared me, Mr. Hardy; you have showed me plainly what you think of me—why should you care what I think of you?"

"I didn't ask you what you think of me. I asked you what you think of my *book*."

"And your book is you—or rather Bransecombe is—and you are Bransecombe."

His brows drew together as if in sudden pain.

"I trust to God that I am no longer Bransecombe."

"But you *are*. That is just it. You can't help it. You can bury—starve Bransecombe—do what you will; he is there, living, and you can't kill him. And why, in Heaven's name, should you try? He was a man 'with blood in his veins'—he loved, he felt!" Her slight accent grew stronger in her excitement.

"And I? Do I not live, do I not feel? Ah, yes, I *feel*, whatever you may say."

"Feel, yes. Pain, hunger, sleep—what have you felt beyond these physical sentiments for years? Have

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you ever felt the—the joy, the rapture that was his—*yours*—that morning in the olive grove, for instance? ”

Hardy rose. “ All this is quite useless,” he said, quietly. “ You have discovered my secret, and will betray it or keep it as you choose. I do not wish to discuss my past life with you—or with any one—so I will go. Good-by.”

Before she could answer he was gone. He was gone, but he was still there! That was the advantage she had over him. He was there in the red book.

CHAPTER XXIV

LORD YARROW lay in bed, facing the windows, which were open, and framed the glories of a midsummer sunset.

Across the bars of crimson and gold that melted softly into purple as he watched, birds flew, black as ink; a larch off to the left, still hung with rain drops, glittered and gleamed, each separate leaf edged with fire.

“ Dear old place.”

Lady Yarrow, sitting in a big chair by the bed, started up as her husband spoke. “ What is it, dear? ”

“ Nothing. But I do love the old place, Mary. It was kind of you to come here to live. Most women would have insisted on Yarrow.”

“ I liked this better, Borrow,” she answered, simply, “ and I love it better every day.”

“ Shall you stay on? ” he asked, after a pause, during which the light faded from the larch, leaving it a darkening mass against the paling sky.

“ Yes, dear,” she returned. She knew what he meant, and that nothing troubled him more than an emotional acceptance of such remarks.

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“ But, if it’s a boy, when he’s of age, he will want to live there. It will be perfectly natural, for, of course, it’s a much more splendid place than this.”

Turning, she laid her hand on his and smiled at him. “ Then ‘ he ’ may go, and I will stay here; and if he should be a she? ”

“ For your sake I could almost wish it—a daughter means so much more to a woman—but the old race must continue, Mary. I am almost sure it will be a boy, and the feeling makes me so happy. By the way, is the jessamine—all right? ”

“ The jessamine! what makes you think of that? ”

“ Oh—it came into my head. I like the old thing, you know. Have you noticed it of late? ”

She shook her head. “ No, I’ve not been in the walled garden for—ever since you have been in bed.”

“ And that is—ten days? ”

“ A fortnight to-day, dear.”

The glory had faded from the windows; the sky, still pale rose color, was melting into gray; the birds had disappeared. The scent of roses came up to them from the garden, the sound of a woman’s voice singing in the distance.

“ What day is this? ” Yarrow asked at length, closing his hand gently around his wife’s. “ I mean the date.”

“ It is the 14th of August.”

“ So, the glorious twelfth is over! I have something to tell you, Mary.”

“ Yes? I wonder what it can be.”

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“ I had Jarvis telegraph to Woodvil to come down some day this week.”

“ Is he still in England? I thought he said he was going to India.”

“ He did. I—asked him to put off going for a little while.”

Again understanding, she said nothing.

“ You needn’t see him, of course, if you don’t care to. But—he is my oldest and dearest friend. You understand.”

“ Yes. Whatever you do is right. Whatever you have done all your life has been right. I don’t believe any woman who ever lived has been so proud of her husband as I am of mine.” The voice was very steady, perhaps a little *too* steady.

“ My dear girl! What I want you to remember, when the time comes, and you are sorrowing for me, is that you have made me perfectly happy. That every minute since you married me I have thanked God for letting you do so. We have never talked much about it, but you know that I always understood, and you mustn’t forget that my greatest wish as a dying man, is that you may be happy.”

She could not speak now, and bent her head in silence over his hand, remaining thus awhile in the solemn silence of the evening and the room so soon to be a death chamber. At length he moved his hand gently, and she leaned back in her chair.

“ I wish you would go and walk a little now, dear,” he said, gently. “ It will do you good. Go into the dear

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little walled garden and bring me a bit of jessamine."

"I never go there now," she protested, rising. "I always go to the terrace."

"But if I ask you? And I *want* the bit of jessamine."

She left the room slowly, and until she came back, he lay wondering half feverishly about the jessamine. He was not a superstitious man, but a faint belief in this particular superstition was in his blood, and now as he lay in the dusk, watching the darkness come in at the windows, he longed for her return with an almost sickening eagerness.

The two angels were drawing so near, he thought. It was a race between them; his imagination almost saw them soaring towards the house across the pale sky, the black and the white wings outspread. If only the white wings proved the better! If only the white angel reached the goal first!

He could welcome the other then with serenity. His man came in and went to the windows to close them. "Wait a little, Jarvis. Give me ten minutes." Before the ten minutes were over Mary had come in.

"It is such a beautiful evening," she said, "but the windows must be shut now, it is growing cooler." She rang as she spoke.

"Mary—you were *there*—in the walled garden?"

"Yes, dear."

"Did you bring me——?"

"Yes."

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“ Is the—the whole plant healthy? No—dead branches? ”

“ No,” she answered, faintly surprised, “ it is covered with flowers.”

She put into his hand a little damp spray, the scent of which reached him at once.

In his weakness he could barely restrain the “ thank God ” that would have seemed so disproportionate to her.

The days passed slowly, each one taking with it a little of his strength, bringing with it a clearer vision of the two angels.

They seemed to him to be winging their steady way from afar, and that his eyes only were clear enough to see them.

His bedroom was in a wing, and by shoving his bed a little out of its place early in the morning, his nurses gave him the happiness of seeing the sun rise every day.

And in the morning, in the glow so different from that of the evening, the two angels were as visible as they were when the sun had gone down. They grew more distinct as time passed. He even saw them during the day, and he never mentioned them to any one, partly because he perfectly recognized that they were a hallucination; partly because they were very sacred to him.

About a week after the picking of the jessamine, Woodvil came. It was evening when he arrived, and when he entered the room Yarrow did not at first notice him.

The sick man lay with his eyes fixed to the sky, which

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was brilliant but massed with purple clouds which presaged a storm.

Woodvil stood quite still, watching the face of his friend, and drawing deep breaths to steady the voice he knew would shake when he spoke.

At length, however, as Yarrow did not move, the man in the door was taken with a little shiver of terror, and, hoarsely, he spoke the other's name.

"Woodvil! Dear old boy! Do you see, the white one is ahead!"

Then, quietly, he explained, as he could not have done a week ago, what he meant.

The two men sat talking in low voices for a long time. Jarvis closed the windows, lighted one lamp, and left them alone. They talked of their boyhood, the greater part of which had been passed together; of the old school in Paris, the holidays at Yarrow and at Brighton, where the then Lord Yarrow had a house.

"Do you remember how your mother danced for us once? And how lovely her foot was in the pink shoes?"

Woodvil nodded. "Don't I? Do you remember the boat your father gave us, that we named the Laura for that little red-haired imp of Farrar's?"

On and on they talked, laughing at times, at times pausing. At length the sick man, after a longer pause than usual, began with a new note in his voice: "Jacques, there is something I *must* say to you."

"Then—why don't you?"

"Because it is going to be hard for me to say, and harder for you to listen to. But I must say it, so here goes. Why don't you divorce—that woman?"

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Woodvil started. "I am a Catholic, George."

"I know. But—there is one ground on which your Church recognizes divorce."

"Yes. Well, I'll tell you. When—it happened, she was only eighteen, and I had misunderstood her and treated her in the wrong way—it was my own fault, more than hers. No one knew about it; there was no particular scandal; every one had known that we didn't get on well together, and—we had been in the country—no one had suspected anything else. The man was her cousin and had always been about the house. She went back to her people, and I—to Patagonia, as you remember. Afterwards—she had taken her father's name again and was living at home—there was no use in making a row. Unless I had made a public scandal I could not have got a decree, so I let it drop."

"But—in case you had wished to marry?"

The other man was silent for a few minutes, his mobile, fine-cut face a little white in the faint light.

"After I *had* let it drop for so long, I had no right, for ends of my own, to retract the—pardon I had given her."

"I think," said Yarrow, very distinctly, as he finished, "that you have been wrong all along. You have a right to your own life—you ought to do it now, and be a free man—to begin again."

"Borrowdaile!"

"Yes, Jacques, I know, but you must let me speak, old boy. You love her still, you know you do."

"That has nothing to do with it."

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“ But it has. I am dying. She has been an angel to me; she will mourn me very sincerely; but—Jacques—must I say it? She loves you.”

Woodvil groaned. “ No, no, *don't!* Yarrow—you mustn't.”

“ I must. In a way you are right. It will be hard on *her*, on the poor little Spaniard—but it is a case of the survival of the fittest. I must fight for—my own. Some day you must tell Mary—all this.” Woodvil was silent.

Yarrow had always been unlike other men, but this was almost impossible to meet.

Woodvil had just arranged a meaningless phrase to say when the door opened and Lady Yarrow appeared in a dressing-gown. “ I have come to say good-night, dear.”

Yarrow roused himself. “ The white angel,” he murmured, and then, with an effort of will, took in the situation. “ Mary, dear—Woodvil is here.”

“ Ah.” Without shyness she came in, her flowing gown brushing over the carpet, and held out her hand. “ It is kind of you to come.” Then she went to the bed, kissed her husband, and left the room.

“ When the sun rises,” Yarrow went on, as the door closed, “ I'll have them call you, and I'll show you the angels.”

CHAPTER XXV

“WHATEVER you may say, Charles,” observed Mrs. Dudley, turning the cock of the coffee-urn with a little jerk, “I consider it really indecent of her.”

The Rector laughed. “Poor Mary! First you find her skirts indecent, and now her conduct.”

“And you, of course, think that everything she does is right.”

“Everything! That would be going pretty far, wouldn’t it? No, I shouldn’t say that, but I like her skirts—I like the way they—bulge out about her feet—and in this particular case I don’t see how she is to be blamed!”

The sun shone in at the open windows, glancing on the old silver and the delicate china that the Rector loved, drawing flashes of light from the gilded frames of the portraits on the green and white striped walls, and sweetness from the window boxes of heliotrope. The Rector, whose chair was near one of the windows, reached out his thin, old hand and broke off a little tuft of the purple sweetness as he spoke. He was very fond of heliotrope, and had a way of wearing a bit in his buttonhole, which his wife condemned as unsuitable.

Mrs. Dudley watched him for a minute as he sniffed at his flower, and then remarked, “I have frequently

told you, Charles, that it is dangerous to smell flowers in that way. There are often insects on them, and they sometimes go up the nose. A cousin of my mother's suffered greatly once from having a little beast up her nose. It laid eggs in the mucous membrane, and was very tiresome, indeed."

The Rector knew the story, and laid his heliotrope on the table.

"I'd like some coffee, Rebecca," he said, shoving his cup towards her.

He always drank two cups, and never without a protest on her part.

He awaited the protest, and it came. "Coffee is *so* bad for the nerves, Charles, and you are nearly seventy. I read yesterday an account of a new kind of malt coffee that they say is not only excellent for the health, but also very delicious."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear, but I think I'll continue to take my malt in my beer," he interrupted, hastily. "Ah, what is that—some one galloping."

A groom drew up outside the windows.

"Good morning, sir. If you please, Mr. Dudley, I was to tell you that it's a boy, and Her Ladyship is doing well."

"A boy! Thank God! Go to the kitchen, Roger, and tell them to give you some beer. Rebecca, it's a boy, bless its heart!"

Mrs. Dudley poured the cream into his coffee with a severe face.

"And that man in the house!"

“ She could hardly have put it off, could she? ” the old man interrupted, frivolously. “ No, no, no more coffee, thanks. I must go and see George. Thank God he has lived to see it.”

He rose and going to his wife raised her red face with his hand. “ You are glad, Rebecca, you know you are. Give me a kiss! ”

“ I am glad, of course. But *at least* get that man out of the house, Charles, if you have to ask him to stop here. It is—unseemly.”

The Rector dropped his chin and sighed. “ Unseemly for poor George to want to see his oldest friend on his deathbed! I can not see it.”

“ Everybody knows that he was wildly in love with her and she with him. No doubt they still are, and even if they aren’t——”

Mr. Dudley hurried out of the room. He considered himself to be unduly sharp-tongued when roused, and he was roused now.

Down the road he trotted, his hat under his arm, the mottled shadows of the trees edging the dusty way glancing on his soft white hair and pink bald spot. Twice he stopped to speak to some one he met; once to the doctor, who, tired after his sleepless night, was ambling homeward on his old bay mare.

“ A boy, Tench, a boy! ” the Rector cried, forgetting that Tench knew all about it.

“ A particularly fine boy, Mr. Dudley, with the Yarrow head and a voice like a—I don’t know what. He roared so that we all laughed, even Her Ladyship.”

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“ And she? Is she all right? ”

“ Perfectly. It is a very sound nature. She'll be about in no time.”

“ And Lord Yarrow? ”

The little doctor hesitated and looked off across the meadow to his right, on which several cows were grazing, knee-deep in moist-looking clover.

“ His Lordship is very weak, you know. But—never in my life, Mr. Dudley, have I had such pleasure as I had when I told him. He was lying watching the sun rise—we had not told him his wife was ill—and when I came in he did not seem to find anything strange in my being there at that hour. It is a very beautiful face, Mr. Dudley, do you not think so? ”

“ I do, indeed, Tench; go on.”

“ His Lordship had, several times, in a sort of wandering he is subject to—resultant from weakness—said something about angels. It seems that there are two angels—I don't quite understand, but he has mentioned them more than once in my hearing. I gave him a glass of a tonic wine first, and then—I told him. He smiled at me, and then said something I didn't catch, but for the word angel. After a bit, tears came to his eyes and rolled down his cheeks—I shall never forget it.”

The Rector held out his hand. “ Thanks for telling me. I am going there now; I may see him for a few minutes, I suppose? ”

“ Oh, yes, certainly. Good-by, Mr. Dudley.”

The two men parted, the good doctor leaning limply over his horse's neck, the Rector almost dancing

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down the sun-speckled road, his bowed legs and slight frame nearly grotesque in their excessive thinness. As he entered the village he met Hardy.

“ Heard the news? ” he cried, while the younger man was still at some distance.

“ No. What is it? I have just come from the Point. A man was killed there last night in a drunken quarrel.”

“ Oh, dear me, dear me! ” The Rector never heard of a case of drunkenness without reproaching himself his one glass of ale or beer per day, and feeling that he ought to abandon it.

“ Yes. What is *your* news? Something agreeable, I should say.” Hardy’s dark, tired face softened as he looked down into the old man’s excited blue eyes.

“ Yarrow has a boy! A boy! ”

They stood talking for a few minutes, leaning against the railing of the little bridge, under which the water, worn to a mere thread by long heat and drought, held its silent way.

“ Yarrow’s friend, Jacques Woodvil, is there,” Mr. Dudley went on. “ Mrs. Dudley says I must dispose of him in some way. He came last night, I believe.”

“ Yes, I met him on his way from the station. Lord Yarrow sent for him, he told me. He expected to go back to London to-day or to-morrow.”

“ Ah! That will please Rebecca. Rebecca found his being there—queer.”

Hardy nodded without speaking. He knew Rebecca. A few minutes later Mr. Dudley was dancing up the avenue at Borrowdaile House, singing to himself, as was

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his way when very happy, a few bars from "Hear me, Norma."

The house door was open, the butler standing near it, talking to the housekeeper. After mutual congratulations Lord Yarrow's nurse was sent for, and consented to Mr. Dudley's having a few minutes conversation with her patient.

Yarrow lay very still among his pillows, a dreamy smile on his lips. He was happy, but very tired. After a time, the smile broadening, he asked: "But where is your hat, Uncle Charles?"

The Rector turned, looked on the table, on the floor, in his chair. No hat was there.

He rang and Jarvis, after a search in the hall, pronounced that there, also, no hat was to be found. The Rector rose, crestfallen.

"I must have left it somewhere."

"But where did you go before you came here?" Yarrow's hollow eyes twinkled.

"*Nowhere*, George," faltered the old man. "I came straight here; *I must have dropped it on the road!*"

Yarrow held out his hand. "Rebecca will go for you."

Mr. Dudley groaned. "I know she will. Well—good-by, my dear boy. I'll come back when I've found it, and see the Prince. May I?"

"Of course you may. I warn you, though, he's very plain, as the little girl said of the chimpanzee. Are *all* small babies so frightful?"

“ Mine was. And he had an awful way of choking over his fists.”

Shaking hands hastily with his nephew, he took his leave, and retraced his steps homeward, searching for the missing hat.

Luckily he found it at the edge of the dusty grass, where he had stood talking to the doctor. Two minutes later he met his wife, who, her skirt hitched well up out of the dust, a large, sensible, ugly hat shading her face, was on her way to the village. “ Dear me, Charles,” she said, fixing him with her eye, “ what have you been up to? ”

“ Up to, my dear? Up to Borrowdaile House,” he returned with a little, nervous laugh.

“ You look—strange. Did you lose something? ” Then the Rector took courage. “ I will not be scolded to-day,” he said, “ on *Borrowdaile’s birthday*. Another word, my love, and I’ll kiss you on the highway! ”

CHAPTER XXVI

“HE and Hecuba ” was locked away in a drawer in Hardy’s writing table.

After his talk with Madame Perez in the yew-arbor he had put it there, and for weeks had had the courage and the weakness to keep it there, in spite of the gnawing curiosity that tormented him. He was afraid to read it; afraid of ruining the comparative mental calm that had been his since he had sent away the MS.; afraid of losing his great pleasure in spending the money it was bringing him.

About a fortnight after his interview with her, Madame Perez sent him a great package of criticisms of his book that she had had collected by a clipping agent. It came by the morning post, and Katie brought it to him as he sat with his family at breakfast.

Feeling his wife’s eyes on him, he flushed uneasily; her vague suspicions were directed in an almost ludicrously wrong direction, but they hurt her, he knew, and he could not explain them away.

The very fact of her not asking what the package contained annoyed him, so that when Algy, attracted by the heap of greenish blue papers on each of which a newspaper item was fastened, inquired about them, he

answered very gently: "Nothing of interest to you, Algy; notices of a new book, that is all."

"All that about a book?"

"Yes. It is a book that Madame Perez is interested in, and wants me to read."

"Dear me, King, what is it? Why doesn't she lend it to us?" his wife asked, relief in her voice and face. "What is the name of it?"

"Why doesn't she lend it to us? Katie, you may burn those papers. I've no time, Abby, to waste on book notices. Will you give me another cup of coffee?"

MacDougall, whose manners had made great progress of late, caused a lucky diversion just here by suddenly reverting to his old way of eating porridge—with the handle of his spoon, and the subject of the package was not again brought up.

After breakfast, Hardy, touched by something in his wife's eyes, as she started upstairs, a child in each hand, said to her: "By the way, Abby, I forgot to give Madame Perez your message about coming to tea that day. Why don't you write her a note and ask her to come to-morrow? I'll be at Sabley on the commission and out of the way."

"Oh, King! Wouldn't you rather be here?"

He laughed. "No, dear, a man is only in the way on such occasions."

"But—I thought you liked her so much," she faltered.

"I wonder why you thought that? I admire her—she is undoubtedly very handsome in her way, and she

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is rather amusing, I suppose; but I can't say I exactly like her. What little I have seen of her character I have not particularly admired."

Abby Hardy's light eyes filled with tears, and she sat down on the step, taking the smaller of the children in her arms.

"King—I have been so awfully silly—will you forgive me? You remember that note that you wouldn't let me see? Well—I was *jealous* about it. I thought you admired her, and that she admired you."

He laughed again, with relief this time, at having quieted her without lying.

"Oh, you goose. Do beautiful women as a rule admire me? Or I them? I haven't laid eyes on Madame Perez since that day."

"Oh, I am *ashamed*. It wasn't that I doubted you, you know, only—now that I can have nice clothes, King, I realize so much more than before how old and plain I have grown."

He laid his hand on her thin hair with genuine tenderness. "My dear girl, we are growing old together, you and I, and, believe me, I mind it no more in you than I do in myself. You have been the best and most uncomplaining wife in the world, bearing your share and my—hastiness—like an angel. If you had the smallpox to-morrow and became perfectly hideous, it would make no difference to me. Nothing could change my affection for you."

When he was alone in his study, the door closed, he went to the window and stood looking out into the garden.

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The plans recommended by the gardening book had proved practicable only as to the cutting of the turf into numerous new beds; the seeds had not sufficed, and two oblong beds which Hardy, seeing his wife's shame and disappointment, had wished to complete by a new order to the seed-man, were still bare of all growth.

"The fault was mine, King. I don't want you to spend another penny. Please," she said, and he yielded.

The long plots of bare earth, one on each side of the garden path, looked like neglected graves, it occurred to Hardy, as his eyes fell on them. The flowers in the other beds, planted too late, were struggling feebly into blossom; only the honeysuckle on the wall and the row of hollyhocks to his right were really worth consideration as garden ornaments.

"Poor Abby," he sighed. The memory of his first sight of her rose before him. She had stood in the small north country Rectory garden, surrounded by asters of all colors, the sun beating down on her pretty head. She had been very pretty in a simple way.

Well—so had he been a handsome enough young fellow in those days. Time spares no one; even Madame Perez's rather flamboyant beauty would fade sooner or later; she would grow yellow and thin—or more probably fat and shapeless, as so many southern women do.

Abby, eager to show her contrition, had sent Algy down to Liscom House with a note, and Madame Perez had accepted the invitation to tea very graciously.

She had been delightful, Abby told him afterwards,

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and wore the most beautiful silver gray batiste gown encrusted all over with lace.

He himself, back from Sabley earlier than he had expected to be, had gone to the Dudleys' instead of coming home for tea. He had not wished to see Madame Perez. Indeed, he wished that she would leave the place. Her knowledge of his two-fold secret chafed him, and the consciousness that she greatly enjoyed her hold on him, and the suspicion that she would not, at a pinch, hesitate to use it, made him angrily uneasy. But she did not go; nearly a month had passed since he had seen her, and she was still here.

The day after the birth of little Lord Borrowdaile, Hardy, who had been to see Yarrow and inquire for Lady Yarrow, came face to face with the woman whom he felt to be his potential tormentor, as he made his way down the shady avenue.

Bowing stiffly, he would have passed her, but she stopped him. "Mr. Hardy," she said, gently, "are you angry with me?"

He was too simple-minded to see that the change of tone was merely a weapon that she was using against him. "Angry!" he paused, and then answered deliberately, "Yes, I have been angry with you."

"Because of—the book. Well—will you forgive me?" Her face was very serious, quiet with that curious immobility that was one of its characteristics.

"Forgive you? Surely there is no question of forgiveness between you and me, Madame Perez."

She had been chafing for weeks over her inability to

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manage him ; his persistence in avoiding her, her knowledge of his half disdain of her, adding a zest to her determination to get the better of him.

Moreover, the book had a strange fascination for her ; she had reread it a half dozen times, seeking, and finding in the man whose story it told, a charm and interest that roused all the worst of the womanhood in her. This man, this Hubert Branseombe, was a man whom she could understand, who could understand her ; he was a man who could love, and who could love her ; he was a man whose love would interest and amuse her, and—there he was a trifle older, but in all essentials the same man, and instead of amusing her by loving her, he disliked and avoided her ! It was not to be borne.

As she stood with him in the quick-fading and returning sunlight, mottled by the restless movement of the leaves, it came to her with a force that took her by surprise, that he *must* love her.

He must say, in that deep, soft voice, often broken with harsh notes that had been the first thing in him to attract her, the words he had said to that other woman in the book. No—not the same, but other, stronger words, for he had lived and suffered since then, and all his powers had strengthened. He was a deeper-natured and stronger Branseombe.

“ Surely this is no question of forgiveness between you and me ? ” The words rang in her ears while she laid her plans, and, with a sigh, set them going.

“ Is there not ? I think there is. You disliked my knowing that you wrote the book, and I—teased you

about it. I had no right to, and I beg your pardon. Moreover—I promise never to tell what I learned by chance.”

An involuntary sigh of relief was his first answer, and then, grateful, he thanked her.

“It was a curious chance that betrayed your secret to me, mine to you,” he went on, after a pause, “and on the whole you have been kinder to me than I to you.”

She shrugged her shoulders gently. “Ah—but you consider mine unpardonable—and, if I were God, I should have forgiven yours at once.”

He started. “If you were— No. Believe me, I condone my sin no more than I do yours.”

His expression had hardened again.

“I know. You are—remorseless. Some day I will tell you why.”

“Why? Why I am, as you say, remorseless?”

“Yes. I know, and you do not. Mr. Hardy, will you not be friends with me? I am very lonely, and I like you.”

She spoke very simply, something almost childlike in her voice, and in the curiously limpid brown eyes that looked almost levelly into his.

He hesitated. “Friends, Madame Perez? You are very kind, and I thank you, but—I am very busy, and besides, I have, I fear, no talent for friendship. Yarrow is my friend, and Mr. Dudley—I never had a woman-friend in my life.”

“That is not surprising to me. You have not needed one. You and your wife understand each other so well

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that you have never needed any other woman. But I confess my motive in asking you was selfish. You do not need a woman-friend, but I—I need a man-friend.”

It was all very banal and absurd. She lowered her eyes to hide an irrepressible glint she felt there, but when she raised them, limpid as at first, she saw that she had succeeded. Banality was the only way with him. He did not like her, was not even attracted by her, but an appeal to his help was a different matter.

“ If ever I can help you in any way,” he said, still a little stiffly, “ I shall be very glad.”

Holding out her hand she thanked him gently, and went her way to the house.

How cold he was, how curiously simple, in spite of the obvious subtleties of his nature! If she had been Mrs. Burrage, the old one-eyed enemy of the Apostles, he could not have met her advance with less enthusiasm.

He was a puzzle that she must unravel, for under, behind his sincere coldness, lay—all those other qualities that she hoped to get at. The very difficulties inspired her with an enthusiasm that was delightful. There was a possibility that she must consider, however, and as it occurred to her she stood still for a moment, biting her lip, and narrowing her eyes. He might have loved that other woman with all the love that was in him; he might be—she smiled as she found the word and dismissed the possibility simultaneously—a burnt-out crater!

CHAPTER XXVII

THROUGH the long gray days Lord Yarrow lay listening to the steady beat of rain on the windows, his room darkened by occasional swoops downward of the wind-tossed trees.

The fine weather that had held so long, was gone, and in the resolute wet the trees took on something of an autumnal air, though September had not yet come. The flowers that the sick man brought in every morning, and the best of which he made into nosegays for his wife, grew faded, the veins in their soaked petals more noticeable, as are the veins in a hand rendered transparent by illness. One angel had come, and now the man in the bed was quietly awaiting the other.

Sometimes they brought the baby and laid it beside him; he never tired of looking at its little red face, and the feeble grip of its fingers brought to him one of the keenest pleasures he had ever known. It was a fine, strong boy, Tench had told him, but it was a superfluous bit of information.

He knew that the child would live; he could see him at successive stages of his life—first learning to walk, holding to his mother's black skirts—then seated for the first time on a horse—then the face grew longer, and

smiled at him over the shiny whiteness of an Eton collar—and so on. The Yarrows all went to Eton and then to Christ Church. This one would do the same, he could trust his wife not to interrupt the old order of things. Later, possibly, politics, and, surely, a wife, and—another little baby.

This was the inevitable end of the dying man's dreams, and sometimes, as the little creature beside him stirred, he looked at it not quite sure whether he were its father or its grandfather.

Woodvil, who was stopping at the Rectory, came every day, and the two men would talk together of the future of the child, who was the godson of the younger.

Yarrow never again referred to the subject which had so distressed his friend. He had expressed his opinion and his wish, and that was enough.

Woodvil, on the other hand, had put the matter out of his mind, as one which only the weakness of illness had led his friend to mention. He was not a religious man, and his life would have borne no such close inspection as Yarrow's, but he had been born a Catholic, and the idea of protesting against the laws of his church had never occurred to him, even years before, when leaving Mary Carmichael had been like cutting at his heart. Since then he had traveled, worked, and being blessed with a healthy nature, both moral and physical, had not been actively unhappy.

On coming back, the autumn before, and hearing her sing, it had come to him with a pang that he had not for-

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gotten her as completely as he had hoped, so he had gone away again, and only Yarrow's inevitably near death had kept him in England.

Of the three men, Yarrow, Hardy, and himself, he was the least intellectual and the simplest, and now awaited the end, which would bring him, with much sorrow, much relief, with a certain unconscious philosophy that smoothed for him a way that would have been unbearable to many men. As soon as it was over he would go away without seeing Lady Yarrow, and there was a certain scheme for bridging a great river in India that would prove sufficiently interesting to distract him from unprofitable musing.

Mrs. Dudley watched the man she found so singular with great interest. She was a good woman, and very curious, and as the days passed, and the time when Lady Yarrow might be expected to become visible again drew near without making her a widow, Mrs. Dudley's emotion increased. Would Mary see him? Or wouldn't she? Would he stay for the funeral, or would he, as would undoubtedly be more delicate, leave the minute his friend's eyes closed?

The Rector, naturally the only person to whom she could express her anxiety, laughed at her.

"Scuttle away without stopping to pack his things. Oh, yes, nothing more likely, my dear!"

However, Rebecca Dudley was not used, she told herself, to being understood by her husband. "Understood" means "agreed with" to so many women.

Personally, Woodvil was very agreeable to her; he

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was not at all a troublesome guest, and, admirable qualities, he neither smoked nor came late to his meals.

Mr. Dudley, who was losing a good part of his life with his nephew, spent hours at the bedside, often silent, sometimes, lulled by the sick man's regular breathing and the hush of the rain, sleeping in his chair. Yarrow grew daily weaker, but his mind was at times curiously clear. Once, waking from a half-sleep, he asked, abruptly :

“ Uncle Charles, why did you ever marry her? ”

The old man started.

“ My dear boy!— What does it matter now? She is a very good woman.”

“ I know,” Yarrow went on with a little laugh, “ but—why? She never was pretty, was she? ”

“ I ought to rebuke your frivolity, but—well, I can't. No, she wasn't pretty. To tell you the truth, it was a— a mistake.”

“ So I have always thought. But—how? ”

The Rector crossed his legs and, laying the tips of his thin fingers together, gave himself up to the joy of narration. He had never in his loyal life told a soul, but—Yarrow was dying, and it would be a certain relief to explain.

“ You see, I visited her father, Sir William Glynn, when I was a curate. It was a delightful house; Sir William the most genial, pleasant of men. Lucy was like him.” He paused reflectively.

“ And Rebecca took after her mother,” finished Yarrow. “ I—I never heard of Lucy, Uncle Charles.”

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The Rector chuckled. "Yes. Distinctly after her mother. And—oh, yes, there was Lucy. Lucy was younger. That is, in effect, the whole story. I was very young and rather awkward. I meant Lucy and—and—they thought I meant Rebecca."

After all these years, a feeling of indignation rose up in Yarrow at his gentle words. They thought he meant Rebecca! It was unnecessary for him to ask who thought so. "They" was of course Rebecca herself!

He laid his chill hand on his uncle's knee. "Dearest old man," he said.

The rain kept on, and at last the first of September came. Lady Yarrow, wheeled into the room on a couch, lay there all the day, the baby, when quiet, beside her. After her first visit, when he was, of course, not admitted, Woodvil came in the evenings, when she was not there.

Once or twice Hardy had come, and her couch was rolled into the next room.

Yarrow seemed to like seeing people; even some of the old tenants and outdoor servants were brought to him. He was very tired, and glad to go, but he liked saying good-by.

At last, one day in September, the end came. It was evening, the rain pelting down with a sudden access of vigor, the wind blowing up strong from the sea. The Rector and Woodvil were sitting with Yarrow, when, without speaking, he fainted.

Mary, sent for hurriedly, came in leaning on the nurse's arm, and without noticing the two men who lin-

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gered, sat down and took her husband's head in her arms. He came to in a few minutes to find himself thus held. "Ah. It has come, Mary," he said, slowly. "Good-by, Jacques, dear old boy. Don't forget. Good-by, Uncle Charles, you must stay—downstairs."

They wrung his hand and left the room hastily and hushed.

In the corridor they met the nurse, bringing the boy downstairs to "say good-night to his papa."

Without a word, the old man took the little creature and carried it back into the bedroom, the nurse following in surprise.

Woodvil found his hat and coat, and went out into the wet, alone. After all, it is hard to be alone. He walked slowly down the road, through Borrowdaile village to the Rectory, to find Mrs. Dudley awaiting him.

"Where is the Rector?" she asked, slowly, as he appeared alone. "It is nearly eight o'clock."

"Yes—I am sorry—the Rector is staying on, Mrs. Dudley. Yarrow is dying."

Mrs. Dudley gave a little inelastic spring of excitement. "Dear me! Poor fellow. Well—I shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Woodvil, but—Henry can put up your things whenever you wish him to."

Woodvil, who somehow was feeling particularly lonely, as well as sad, smiled at her, his white teeth glinting in the lamplight.

"Are you putting me out?" he asked. "Won't you keep me till after the funeral?"

"Then—you think you had better stay?"

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He sank down in a low chair near the fire and leaned his curly head on his hand. "Why shouldn't I stay? He is—or was—my best friend, Mrs. Dudley."

Something in the utter dejection and forlornness of his attitude and voice touched her.

After a pause, she said, gently for her: "I know; it is a great loss to you; but—we are his uncle and aunt, you know, and Lady Sally is an old and close friend of mine——"

He looked up, with eyes that twinkled a little behind the tears that stood in them. "Ah. You mean—that old story?"

"Yes."

And then Jacques Woodvil did what probably astonished Rebecca Dudley as much as it would have some third person, for she realized fully that she was not one of those women to whom confidences naturally come. He told her, in a few words, his version of the week long ago when he had met Mary Carmichael at the house of old Lord Yarrow. "I couldn't marry, you see"—he finished, "so that was the end of it. And it is five years ago."

"It was—very sad——"

Woodvil rose. "Yes, it was sad, but there was no help for it, and—do you think it justifies your turning me out now?"

It must, in justice to her, be said that Mrs. Dudley, touched and somehow convinced, did not hesitate to follow the new lead of her opinion.

"No, I do not," she answered, promptly. "And—

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stay here with us until the funeral is over. Now let's go to dinner."

Woodvil couldn't eat, and, still prompted by the curious new softness that he had managed to find in her hard-shelled nature, she sent him to his room, whither a few minutes later he was followed by a servant with whisky and soda on a tray. The workings of one personality on another is a curious study, and it is safe to say that had Woodvil been even the most charming and touching of women, her treatment of him, middle-aged, hard-featured, and sharp-tongued as she was, would have been different.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ABBY HARDY was not a clever woman, and she certainly was not a suspicious one. Her husband's avowal to her of the nature of his sentiments for Madame Perez had effectually quieted what she in her sudden, piteous consciousness of her own unattractive middle age had felt on first seeing him in a measure, as it seemed to her, intimate with the beautiful mistress of Liscom Place.

That Hardy could ever be in the slightest degree unfaithful to her and to his duty had not occurred to her; she had little imagination and she had the habit of years to fall back on. But that evening at the dinner, while the talk about the book was going on, she had caught the gaze of Madame Perez fixed on Hardy with a curious intensity that had first interested, then startled his wife.

Madame Perez was much younger than she, and until that moment it had never occurred to Abby that in growing old, she was leaving her husband still hovering on the boundary of youth.

Now, her eyes, following those of Madame Perez, seemed to see clearly that whereas she herself was a faded middle-aged woman, on whom no man would ever again look with more than a pitiful kindness, her husband was still, comparatively speaking, a young man,

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and undoubtedly a striking-looking, if not a handsome one.

Something like a flash of intuition, too, showed her that his stern face could have an attraction for the glowing, beautiful Southern woman who was watching him so closely.

And the worst of it was that, to her, Madame Perez seemed absolutely irresistible.

In the long years she had been Hardy's wife, she had, all unconsciously, while admiring him with her whole heart, learned to feel, rather than see, some of his weaknesses, and she realized that while his strong will and his iron sense of duty would prevent his wronging her by the slightest act, his emotionality, which worked in a sort of strange independence, apart from his will, could submit to the right kind of pressure, and make him wretched.

And, the charm of Madame Perez's personality being to herself the strongest Abby Hardy had ever encountered, the poor woman gave a little physical shiver as she caught the sudden gleam in the South American's eyes as they rose from the table.

The impression faded during the evening, and was almost entirely lost in the following days.

Then came the incident of the note, and for an hour her misery had been heart-breakingly acute, for it seemed to her that the worst had come to pass; that Madame Perez had begun to use her siren wiles, and that Hardy would inevitably fall at her feet.

Madame Perez, to do her justice, would, had it

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occurred to her, have spared the other woman at this stage. The great idea of seeking, in the elderly Hardy of to-day, the passionate nature of the man in the book, not yet having occurred to her, and there being not the slightest question of any feeling between herself and Hardy beyond her almost boyish love of teasing, she would have shrunk from giving a pang to the poor woman of whom her only feeling was one of careless pity.

That the note, with its mention of the book, would embarrass Hardy, she knew, and took a malicious pleasure in the thought, but Abby Hardy was of too little significance to her to be even remembered.

Mrs. Hardy, when she had gone to her room that day, looked in her glass, and with a burst of helpless tears told herself that the end was a foregone conclusion. What must come, must come, for she herself was weaponless.

Then Hardy had brought her a cup of tea, and in his gentle way, stroking her hot brow and hands, and unconsciously adopting a voice suited to a child who suffers because he cannot understand, had gradually quieted her.

She felt the sincerity in his voice, in his eyes, and let herself be consoled.

Ashamed of herself, moreover, for her suspicions, she had, as far as possible, mentally dropped the subject, until the day when the bundle of newspaper cuttings had again forced it on her.

The poor woman's misery over this insignificant

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event was such that she felt, as she started up the stairs with the children, that death was her only refuge. She would pray to die.

In the buoyant relief of Hardy's frank words, in every one of which the truth rang, her shame and remorse were painfully keen, and her subsequent happiness the greater. From that day to one shortly after Lord Yarrow's funeral, which had taken place in the next county, at Yarrow, Mrs. Hardy had been very content and busy. Algy was to go to school in a few weeks, and as there were many children to be provided with winter clothes, Miss Ibbetts, the Borrowdaile dressmaker, a cousin of Katie's friend, the butcher, but, by reason of her occupation, a person almost painfully genteel, was already installed upstairs, hard at work.

The chairs and tables of the little room were half-buried in rolls and packages of stuff of different colors; an ironing-board stretched across the back of two kitchen chairs; the portable sewing machine in one window; the cutting board leaning against the wall; these things so delightfully significant of prosperity, hardly left space for the two women, who, hard at work, talked together spasmodically.

Miss Ibbetts, a thin woman of forty, with a rigidity of carriage that poor Abby secretly admired, and a very elaborate coiffure which changed conscientiously according to the exigencies of fashion, as announced in the "Queen," took the last pin from her mouth, after a longer pause than usual, and began, without moving her upper lip: "Yes, I observed to her, as she was so ob-

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stinate: ' Well, Mrs. Penniwell, if the mountain won't come to Hamilton, Hamilton will have to come to the mountain.' And I went."

Mrs. Hardy bit her lip.

" She is certainly a very determined woman. Will that hem be deep enough? "

"Yes. I noticed the other day that passamentary is coming in again. I sat behind that lady who has taken Liscom Place—Madame Perez—in church. Her cloak was one mass of it, and that cloak came from Paris, I'll be bound. That is," she added, primly, " I fancy so."

" Most of her clothes do, no doubt. She is very rich, I believe. She gives Mr. Hardy a good deal of money for the poor."

" Does she? I saw her yesterday going into Burrage's with some packages."

" Burrage's? Dear me, I shouldn't have thought she'd care for *visiting*," ejaculated Mrs. Hardy, threading her needle.

" Perhaps she only went in with Mr. Hardy. He was with her, and I didn't observe her carriage."

There was a short silence, while matters readjusted themselves in Mrs. Hardy's mind. King had not lied to her; King did not admire Madame Perez, but Madame Perez did admire King.

In spite of her utter inexperience, she realized that visiting the poor, with a woman of Madame Perez's stamp, could only be the means to an end.

And, King did not admire Madame Perez *now*, but how long could such a state of affairs last? Abby had

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read very little in her life, and during the last years almost her only books had been certain thin, badly printed, blue paper-bound ones that came to Miss Tench in connection with a subscription to a perfectly harmless, but highly absurd "story paper." Years ago, on reading the first of these tales, Abby Hardy had laughed at them, but gradually, in the absence of other reading matter, had learned first to read them seriously, then with interest, and finally with passion. And now, as she stitched nervously at her seam, her full eyes lowered, she felt as though one of the bad angels of the books had come to life and applied herself to the seduction of her, Abby's, hero.

"She is really ravishing," went on Miss Ibbetts, suddenly, "so extremely distinguée." Abby could not answer.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN Hardy came in that evening, he was very white; the lines in his face looked deeper.

Mrs. Hardy, who, contrary to her habit, was downstairs when he entered, watched him in silence as he took off his wet coat and boots and put on a dressing-gown—a new one—and slippers.

“ Did you see Madame Perez this afternoon? ” she asked, when he had sunk into a chair.

“ Madame Perez? No, why? ” he returned, indifferently.

Her lips shook. “ I—wondered.”

He had leaned back and closed his eyes.

For a few minutes she studied his weary face with a keenness that she felt to be rather cruel, and then, urged by the unbearableness of her position, burst out—

“ Oh King—but you did yesterday!”

Opening his eyes he stared at her for a minute, and then asked, impatiently: “ What did I do yesterday? ”

“ You saw—her. You were with her.”

“ Saw whom? Oh, Madame Perez. For Heaven’s sake, Abby, don’t bother me with that woman.”

Without the year-long influence of poor Miss Tench’s blue books, his tone would have satisfied his wife, but as it was, she only shook her head.

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“ You were seen with her,” she said, rather solemnly.

Controlling himself with an evident effort, he said, gently, “ No doubt. She took some things to some poor people, and I went with her. Why shouldn’t I? Surely *you* don’t mind? ”

“ But I *do* mind, King, I do. I can’t help it. She is so beautiful.” She burst into tears as she spoke, and hid her distorted face in her hands.

“ Abby, Abby—you are not jealous—and at this time of day! Don’t be absurd, my dear. What is Madame Perez to me, or I to her? ”

“ She is nothing to you *yet*, I know,” she sobbed, wildly, “ but you are to her, and, and—I am so old! ”

He rose, and going to her, laid his hand on her shoulder.

“ Listen to me,” he said slowly. “ I have told you that I—that Madame Perez’s beauty is perfectly indifferent to me, and that personally I’d really rather never see her again. I don’t admire her character, and if she is to get on your nerves this way, I shall hate her. Surely you believe me. Stop crying, now, and be sensible. I am utterly upset to-night, and I need my wife.”

“ I *do* believe you, King, I do indeed. Only I am afraid of her.”

“ Well, I am not,” he returned, with a little laugh. “ Abby—there is diphtheria in the village.”

Springing up she faced him, her face red and swollen, her eyes still wet. “ Diphtheria! Oh, King, who has it—and is it very bad? ”

“ There are four cases—the Smith children, two of

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them, the youngest Burrage, and Mary Snape's baby. I thought Nora Burrage looked very bad, yesterday, and asked Tench to look in. Just now, I met him, and he told me. Two of the cases are nearly a week old, and not one of them had been declared. After all I have said on the subject."

"Are any of them very bad?" she asked, feeling vaguely for her pocket.

"Yes. The Snape baby is lost, Tench says, and he can't be sure about little Nora. It is a terrible thing, a disease like that in Carbury. The water supply is shameful, and the people themselves, though they look down on the Pointers, really quite as dirty as they are."

"Will it be an epidemic, King?"

"God knows. Willy Snape is sickening, but he has been inoculated—the worst of it is that the serum is so dear—and so dangerous if not absolutely fresh. Tench is wonderfully generous, but he's not a rich man——"

"I can help a little, King," she said, finally succeeding in finding her pocket, and taking from it her handkerchief and her shabby little purse. "I haven't spent all my money for this month, and I can get on without new gloves; one gets so used to luxuries."

Hardy took the handful of silver and looked at it sadly.

"My poor girl. Thank you, dear. I have something, too, and Lady Yarrow and—others will help."

Abby nodded. "I know. King, why don't you go

now, and—ask them? I mean Lady Yarrow and Madame Perez. It is early, and dinner can wait a little.”

Hardy felt himself to be much more touched than the occasion demanded.

After a pause he decided to do as she suggested. It would show her that he had not taken her little outburst as having any serious meaning, and it would give him in his restlessness the satisfaction of doing, having done, something definite.

Back down the hill he went through the soft rain, his heart full of pain.

The people he lived among were dear to him, and the thought of the danger they were to run, above all, the danger in which their children would be, should the diphtheria spread, was very dreadful to him. Lord Yarrow had been in his grave only about ten days, but no feelings of conventionality withheld Hardy from going to the house and asking to see Lady Yarrow. The butler's hesitation he hardly observed, and, buried deep in thought, walked slowly up and down the drawing-room until the widow came in.

He started at the sight of her black gown, and then, seeing that she carried her baby, his stern face relaxed.

“It is good of you to see me. And it is a good sign for the success of my errand that you have brought—Yarrow with you.”

Mary smiled sadly, and drew the covering from the child's face.

“Yes. Yarrow came with me. Hush—he is asleep.”

Hardy had always admired her, in an absent way,

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but it seemed to him to-night as though he stood in the presence of some one beautiful and wonderful. The very bend of her smooth head as she looked down at her baby impressed him as something half sacred.

For a second he paused, innocently unconscious that this sentiment, never felt by him in his wife's case, was due to the mere human beauty of the woman before him, and then, before he had broken the silence, she spoke. "I hear that there is diphtheria in your village."

"Yes."

"I am so sorry, Mr. Hardy. When I was told, I knew that you would come, so—we are prepared."

Again with the little sad smile she pointed to a small velvet bag that hung by a ribbon from the baby's neck, resting on the pillow on which she carried him.

"It is his first offer—it will not be his last."

Slipping the ribbon from under the child's neck she held the bag to Hardy. It was heavy.

"I think," she went on, "that every one who knew my husband will miss him, but I don't want you to miss him *in that way*. You must always come, not to me, Mr. Hardy, but to our son, when you need money for your people, and—he will help you all he can."

Hardy thanked her confusedly, and a few minutes later was once more outdoors, stumbling down the dark avenue, the little bag, so heavy in proportion to its size, bearing down one of his pockets.

As he splashed through the wet he laid his plans, and by the time he was seated in the Red Room at Liscom House, they were in a state of rough completion.

Madame Perez was dressing for a dinner when his name was brought to her.

She hesitated for a minute when her maid had given her the message.

“ What time is it? ”

“ Nearly seven, Madame. Shall I bring Madame’s white tea-gown? ”

Madame Perez looked narrowly at herself in the glass, and then, kicking off her bedroom slippers, sat down.

“ No. Tell Bowles to ask Mr. Hardy to wait a few minutes. Then—dress me.”

The dinner was to be a large one, and the gown on the bed was an elaborate white one, half covered with Mechlin lace.

When at length it was hooked and laced to perfection the maid fastened a chain of splendid diamonds about her mistress’s neck, and catching up her gloves, Madame Perez went downstairs.

“ How do you do—friend? ” she said softly, coming in behind Hardy, and laying her hand on his shoulder. He started up, taken aback by her appearance, as she had intended him to be.

“ How—beautiful you are,” he stammered, with the simplicity of a child.

“ Am I? I am glad, if it gives you pleasure.”

She stood near him, her hands, holding the long gloves, elapsed before her. Somehow the man, pale, tired, with muddy boots and a wet coat, pleased her more than ever. He smiled, dreamily, looking at her for

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a second, and then, with a little shake of the head, laughed aloud at himself.

“What an idiot you must think me! Well—I will not detain you. I have come to beg, Madame Perez.”

“To beg?”

His change of tone gave her a little shock. She recalled, involuntarily, the scene in the garden in his book—the scene in which he had, with the realization of his forty-odd years, described the wiles with which “Gilda” had wrung from the unwilling boy his first declaration of love.

A little smile stirred her lips as she looked at him. There was much of the boy in him still.

“To beg?”

“Yes. There is diphtheria in the village—in two of the poorest houses there.”

He stood waiting, having in fact asked for nothing, yet waiting for her to give.

“You want money? Ah, yes, money is easy to give, and easy to receive. It is—the other things that one mustn’t ask for,” she returned slowly, looking deep into his clear, uncomprehending eyes.

“The other things——?”

“Yes. Friendship—and affection, and—love.”

She watched the shadow of understanding come to him, but held him fixed with her gaze.

“I see,” he said, at length, “no reason why one should not ask for friendship when one needs it.”

“And—affection?”

“And—affection.”

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He did not move, but his face hardened as she went on.

“ And—love? ”

“ Most people are loved by some one. I see that every day. The poorest, least attractive boor in my parish has a wife who loves him. It is in his house, by the way, that one of the diphtheria cases is.”

Rosalba Perez’s soft mouth stiffened into a thin line.

“ Then—they are happy, in spite of everything,” she answered, her voice still studiously gentle.

“ How much money do you want? ”

Hardy drew a deep breath of relief. He had felt the danger, without quite realizing it, and now it seemed past.

“ You are very good. The more you can give, the better. I will be a faithful steward.”

She opened the drawer from which she had given him her first offering, on the occasion of his first visit, and taking from it the same purse, handed it to him.

“ Take it all, it isn’t very much. And when you need more—come again.”

Feeling for some reason ashamed of himself, he thanked her. “ You are very good, Madame Perez—and we *are* friends, you know? ”

She laughed gayly.

“ Yes? Then—you may, in token of our friendship, kiss my hand. You have been in countries where it is the custom—a pretty custom——”

Years ago, in the warm, heliotrope-scented garden, Silvia Aldobrandi had taught him to kiss her hand,

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laughing at the awkwardness of the English handshake.

He had taken her hand, raised it to his lips, felt his heart-beats hurry—and then, dropping it unkissed, caught her in his arms.

That had been the beginning, and she had read it all in the book.

For a minute he hesitated, and then, making a half-caricatured bow, took her hand on his finger, and raising it in a grotesque curve to his mustache, kissed it ceremoniously.

“ You see, I am no cavalier, and for years I have not been out of ungraceful England—so forgive my awkwardness.”

She stared at him in genuine surprise.

His tone, that of a half-mocking man of the world, was new in him.

Could it be possible that he had simply not understood? Then, as he took his hat, and bowing again, left the room, she caught sight of his face, and smiled.

He had understood.

CHAPTER XXX

SHE was right. Hardy had understood; and as he went homewards, her money in his pocket, his feelings were very complicated.

His opinion of her character being what it was, it is not surprising that he was tempted to look on her now as something almost inhumanly bad.

He by no means considered himself as a good man. His life, which for years had been admirably unselfish and kind, was as nothing to him, when compared with that one event years ago. That had stamped him as a wicked man, and as a wicked man he still thought of himself.

He was a sinner whose greatest efforts could only in a slight measure cancel his terrible sin. But his office was sacred. As a clergyman of the Church of England he considered himself sacred, and this woman had deliberately tried to tempt him. Therefore, she was to him a monster.

She was, however, a monster who gave money to his poor, and before he decided to renounce her utterly, he must consider.

The money meant a great deal to his people; what

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he must do was to balance the pros and cons; to decide whether, in plain English, the game was worth the candle.

She was very beautiful, very seductive in her delightful room, her hand was very soft, and he was a man weaker, he thought, than other men.

“ I should,” he told himself, with a gravity that, to an outsider, would have bordered on the ridiculous, “ have liked to kiss her hand.”

But he had resisted her, and probably she would let him alone in the future.

Meantime, the money was there in his pocket, and with it he could do a great deal.

It was indicative of the man's essentially simple character that, in spite of his early experience, the only possible parallel in his life to this later one, it never occurred to him that Madame Perez could be in love with him.

Silvia Aldobrandi had been, and before he had loved her, but even this suggested nothing to him in the present case.

Madame Perez wanted him to make love to her, him, a married man and a clergyman; therefore, Madame Perez was a very bad woman. Further than that he did not go. He was a middle-aged, shabby, hardworking man, she a young, beautiful, rich woman, and the possibility of her having been actuated by other than motives of malicious mischief did not occur to him. On his way through the village he was stopped by a man who told him that another case of diphtheria had appeared, and

that the doctor was still at the house. This turned his thoughts into a new channel, and he reached home, his mind as innocent as a baby's of all thoughts of the beautiful woman he had just left.

The sight of his wife's face, pale and anxious, brought it back with a shock.

"King," she began at once, "you *won't* go into any of the infected houses, will you? It is too dangerous for the children."

Hardy changed his coat and sat down, telling her of his success with Lady Yarrow and Madame Perez, and with her counted the money, which amounted to a very large sum.

"I knew Lady Yarrow would be generous, King, but—I am ashamed of having been so—silly about Madame Perez. She is really very good."

"She is very free with her money, at all events. I am starving, Abby; what have you for me?"

After glancing at his letters, which he had not noticed before going out, and among which he saw one from the Bishop, they went to the dining-room and he made a hearty meal, she watching him.

It struck him as curious that to-night, just when he had for the first time proof of the correctness of her intuitions regarding Madame Perez, she should be so convinced of the unjustness of her suspicions.

"I knew all along that I was silly, King, for if she was that kind of a woman, of course she would have gone in for Sir Ludovic or Lord Winship—or even for poor Lord Yarrow, who admired her so much."

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Hardy poured out a glass of ale. "You mean—I'd be too humble prey for her?" he asked, laughing with a slight feeling of annoyance.

"Yes, from her—I mean the imaginary *her*—point of view. For of course she is really too good and kind to do anything of the sort—don't you think?" He started.

"My dear Abby, you do put the most difficult questions."

"I only meant that as she gives so much to the poor she *must* be kind, and—anything of that sort would be so terribly unkind."

He rose. "Yes, very unkind. Well, I must go and see what the Bishop has to say, and write one or two letters." With a feeling of great relief he closed his door behind him, and sat down.

His room, still shabby, was comfortable now; his chair had new springs and was covered with a sober brown imitation leather; the sofa was re-covered, and only a few days before he had come home to find a new rug stretched before his fireplace—a cheap, inartistic rug, but whole, and cheerful looking. Altogether, there was a great difference between what the room had been, and what it was now.

He frowned and looked uneasily towards the drawer in which "He and Hecuba" was locked away. He wished the book was not there; the thought of it haunted him.

At length, with a sigh, he opened his letters, all of them short and unimportant except that of the Bishop,

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which he read last, his face changing curiously as he turned the closely-written pages.

Suddenly he laid it down on the table, and then for the first time noticed that it was lithographed from His Lordship's handwriting.

He glanced again towards the locked drawer. It had come, then; that which, in one form or another, had been bound to come. The lock was of no avail to him; his book must come out of its hiding-place, and he must read it.

For the Bishop's letter announced the beginning of his crusade, vigorous and picturesque, against Yellow Literature; and contained, besides his brief announcement of his purpose, a letter sent by him by the same post to every clergyman in his diocese, to be read by these clergymen aloud in church the following Sunday. Hardy read the spirited, well-chosen words slowly through several times, and then, opening the drawer at his right hand, took out "He and Hecuba," and began to read.

He read rapidly, turning the pages with a quick gesture, never pausing, until suddenly, dropping the book to the floor, he groaned aloud: "My God, did I write that?"

It seemed hardly possible. The book was brilliant, but brilliant as is a surgeon's knife, flashing as it cuts its way into a hideous sore; it was all true, every word of it, drawn with miniature-like fidelity from the pictures his morbid conscience had for years been impressing on his memory.

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He had written it, and yet it was so new to him. He took it up, and read to the end without stopping. Sometimes he laughed, sometimes opened his eyes wide to keep the tears that blinded him from falling. The vividness, the strength of it, the almost miraculous intensity, took him completely by surprise.

The end, that part which he had written after the dinner at Borrowdaile House, drew the color from his face. It appalled him.

He had lived the story; he had not added to it one word; it was absolutely true; yet the latter part of it terrified him in its cynicism, in its evil.

The whole thing was evil, but this was, in the way he had told it, full of a wicked strength, a power for ill that almost stopped his heart. And he had written it.

At length he rose, wiping the sweat from his face.

"It is a wonderful book," he said, slowly, aloud. "An amazing book. And the man who wrote it is a bad man, and that man, God help me, is I."

As he finished, some one knocked at the door.

"Oh, King, MacDougall has the croup! Won't you come?"

With a gesture of despair he answered from his place: "I will come at once, Abby."

He listened to her footsteps as she went upstairs, and then, going to the window, flung it open, and leaned out into the damp air.

He felt that he could not go to his wife and child without purification.

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Then, with a jarring laugh, he tossed the book into the drawer and locked it.

“ Touching it can hardly contaminate me,” he said, “ seeing that I wrote it.”

MacDougall was ill all night, so ill that towards morning Hardy went for the doctor.

The rain had ceased, and the east was clear with a transparent light, that meant better weather. Weary with his long vigil, the new trouble for the time reducing the older one to insignificance, Hardy enjoyed the walk in the sweet air.

He was too worn out for consecutive thought, and the relief of not hearing the sick child’s labored breathing seemed positive happiness to him. The little doctor hurried down, his face still wrinkled with sleep.

“ Poor Mrs. Hardy,” he exclaimed, putting on his coat by the light of a candle. “ She has her share.”

Hardy nodded. “ Yes. Poor Abby.”

“ You look done up yourself, Hardy. You mustn’t burn the candle at both ends. You aren’t as young as you once were.”

Hardy laughed. “ Forty-three, Tench. I’m well enough, but I haven’t been in bed at all to-night. I—was reading.

Tench echoed his laugh, but in a more genial key. “ To be perfectly honest, so was I—reading! I read till after three, old fool that I am. And a novel, too. ‘ He and Hecuba;’ have you read it? ”

“ Yes. Did—did you like it, Tench? ”

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They had reached the garden gate.

“ Like it? Well—it’s clever. One of the cleverest books I ever read, but of course, from your point of view, it’s rotten.”

Hardy laughed again. “ Yes, it’s rotten,” he repeated, opening the gate.

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT morning's post brought Hardy a large cheque from his publishers, his share of the sale of his book in America. In the accompanying letter, the publishers urged him to send them another novel as soon as possible, offering him a large sum for it, and 25 per cent. on sale. "The sale of 'He and Hecuba' has been so phenomenal," they wrote, "that we cannot express strongly enough our opinion that, by not bringing another book on the market immediately, both you and we would be guilty of the greatest mistake."

It was the most intense relief to Hardy to sit down at once and write an unconditional refusal to this offer.

"So help me God!" he exclaimed, as he stamped his letter with a blow of his fist.

What was done was done, but he would do no more. As soon as he was at leisure, he locked his door, and re-reading the Bishop's letter, took his book from the drawer and began it again.

MacDougall was better, and as he read, he could hear the regular sound of his wife's new rocking-chair upstairs, and her crooning voice as she hushed Harold to sleep.

The day had borne out the promise of the dawn, and was fine; the sun shone in at the well-washed windows,

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one of which was open, and the narrow strip of gray that was the sea glinted in the light. From time to time Hardy looked up from his reading, and stared absently at the heavy-leaved trees outside. The more he studied his book the more he saw the unredeemed badness of it, the strength it held for evil. And yet, as he went on, a feeling of pride rose up in him. Pride that he could have written it; that the easy, strong English was his; the knowledge of the natures described in it; the light sketching in of scenes that were as vivid as pictures.

Its cleverness amounted almost to genius, and its cleverness was his.

A resentment against the circumstances that prevented the sweets of celebrity being his—a longing to tell some one that he had written it, and a bitter shame that he had been capable of it, mingled themselves inextricably in his mind.

What he wanted he did not know. The book was a sin, and at the same time a glory.

It carried him back, ah, *how* it carried him back into his youth. He saw, and felt and heard, the sights, the emotions, and sounds of that far-off time—the book fell from his hands; his demon had him fast in his clutches again, only, this time, he was a willing victim.

The feeling that remorse would follow, was wanting, for the first time; he was young again, living again, happy again—and then, the sunlight ceasing to fall on him caused him to look up.

Madame Perez, laughing, stood in the window.

“ Dreaming, are you? ” she said. “ Dreaming over

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the book. Oh, don't you *see* what a wonderful book it is? "

He rose.

" Yes, it is wonderful," he said slowly. " What are you going to do? "

" What am I going to do? "

" I mean, are you coming in? You have come to see Abby? "

" No. I have not come to see Abby. I have come to see you. *You, you, you!* " As she spoke, she entered the room. " Oh, not the you of to-day. Not the sombre, busy, Rector of Carbury; what have *I* to do with him? I want the other you. The you of then—the you of the garden, of the olive-grove, of—of the drawing-room with the spinet."

He had grown white. " I think you must be mad, Madame Perez," he said, " that man is—dead long ago. But—the Rector of Carbury is—glad to see you, and will—call——"

She caught his arm as he turned.

" No, no, stop! Call no one. And don't lie. He is not dead. He is alive. Those are his eyes—and his head—and his lips—he is there, but stronger and more splendid than ever, and—I love him."

As the possibility of this had never occurred to him, now it never occurred to him to doubt its truth.

He stood, rigidly still, staring at her, and then at length said: " You must go, and never come back. I—I will try to forget."

But she laughed. " Forget. You *can not* forget.

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No man in the world could forget. I love you, I say, I! And I knew only last night. And you love me, or you will in a few minutes."

The strangeness of her last phrase arrested his attention. "Or you will in a few minutes."

The sound of the rocking-chair still came to him through the thin ceiling; the crooning voice upstairs went on; and he was to love this woman in a few minutes.

"You have read your book now," she went on, breathlessly, "you have read the end. And—you were not drunk when you wrote it; you were inspired. It is all true. What matters anything else? What does it matter? All these years you have tried not to be that which you were *made*, and you have failed! Failed utterly! You are the old King Hardy, the man who loved and forgot, and lived."

He had never seen her so beautiful as now in her passion.

"Love is God of all," she went on, rapidly. "The poets all say it, and they are right. I never knew until now. If it were not true, why should I, Rosalba Perez, be here in this way, humbling myself to—you? Tell me that!"

"I can tell you nothing, but you must go. You must go at once."

He took her hands that had been clinging to his unresisting arm and forced them away from him; then slowly, he pushed her to the window.

"Go," he repeated. "Go."

She was about to speak again when the regular sound overhead ceased and footsteps crossing the floor attracted her attention.

“ Yes, I will go,” she answered, hastily, glancing towards the door. “ And you—you will stay, and remember.”

The footsteps were on the stair now, and Madame Perez had disappeared. Hardy stood quite still for a minute, and then pulled the curtains together with a jerk, changing the light in the room to a golden dusk.

His wife, however, did not come in, and shortly afterwards he heard her go upstairs again.

He sat for nearly an hour, huddled in his chair, trying to think, but succeeding only in feeling and seeing over again the scene he had just been through. She had been right. He remembered. Remembered every word she had said, every change of expression in her beautiful eyes, every touch of her hands on his arm.

He had told her she was mad; he had sent her away, but he remembered. And he must always remember. Suddenly his foot touched the book he had dropped to the floor on first seeing her.

As if it had been a foul reptile he caught it up, and after staring at it with hatred for a minute or more, he knelt by the fireplace, and wrenching the gaily-bound covers off, tore the thick pages across, and laid it in the grate. Then he set fire to it, and watched it burn, the flames flickering over his grim face, until it was a heap of ashes.

That was done. Rising, he stood deep in thought.

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He had sinned in writing the book, and this was his punishment. He was made the prey of the wicked love of a wicked woman; he was living in comfort provided by his own wickedness; his life was in vain; he was damned.

He could not read that letter of the Bishop's in church, he, who had written the worst of the books against which the letter was written.

There was only one thing to be done. A thing that, in the woe it would work to innocent people, would break his heart; a thing that would probably lose him his means of livelihood, and certainly the esteem of all good men.

And this thing he would do. He would do it, and at once.

Taking his hat, he went upstairs. The babies were asleep in the tidy room; his wife, in a fresh, neatly-made dressing-gown sat sewing by the window. He paused in the doorway. It was a homely, comfortable scene, and the content in his wife's face as she looked up made it very tragic.

"Abby," he said, abruptly, "I am going to see the Bishop—on business. I can just catch the train, and will stop the night. Good-by."

"To see the Bishop, dear?" she answered, threading her needle. "Very well. Have you packed your bag—are you ready?"

"I am ready, yes."

"Then, good-by—and—King—" She flushed and hesitated, her eyes filling suddenly. "*Could* you get

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me two yards of imitation Valenciennes about half an inch wide? I—I am making some things—Oh, King, God is going to give us another little baby.”

Hardy kissed her hastily, and with a muttered answer, rushed downstairs and out into the evening.

That was the end, then. He could not do it. It was out of the question.

CHAPTER XXXII

OCTOBER passed slowly, nothing happening, beyond a series of deaths in Carbury; and Rosalba Perez, alone with the passion that had taken her so suddenly by storm, looked forward with horror to the winter.

The epidemic, now an established, inevitable fact, was very severe, the steady bad weather making the work of stamping it out the more difficult. Almost every day there was a little funeral, and most of the people in the village mourned some child. Tench did his best, and Lady Yarrow's bounty was inexhaustible, but the disease had taken a peculiarly virulent form, and the good little man's efforts seemed almost in vain.

Twice, Madame Perez had seen Hardy. Once as she drove home from Sabley-on-Sea, she had met him walking, and stopping her carriage, called him.

"Where are you going?" she asked him peremptorily in French. "I am going to the Point," he answered in English.

"May I drive you?" she spoke English too, this time.

"Thanks, I prefer to walk."

And he had gone on, with a stiff bow.

The second time she saw him was at the Dudley's,

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where, on going to the drawing-room, she had found him alone.

“ Mrs. Dudley asked me to wait,” he said, as the servant closed the door. She looked at him closely for a minute and then held out her hand. “ Will you forgive me? I think I must have been mad.”

“ Yes, I forgive you; and I told you at the time that you were mad.”

Her hand, by a violent effort, lay passive in his, and then she withdrew it quietly. “ It was the book, I suppose,” she went on, with a reflective smile. “ It is—horribly human—the book.”

Hardy raised his heavy eyes. “ It is a horrible book,” he said.

“ No, no. But—I am a Southern woman, remember, and I have never loved; perhaps I may be forgiven for having fallen in love with a man in a book!”

He flushed. “ Anything I may have to forgive you is forgiven long ago,” he said, and then Mrs. Dudley came in and cut the conversation short.

As she went up the avenue at Borrowdaile House a fortnight later, Madame Perez was thinking of the interview. Hardy had looked very ill, and very unhappy. She knew from one of her servants that he had nearly fainted in church the Sunday after her visit to him at his house, and had been prepared for a change in him, but the haggard lines in his face had startled her, and the black half of his mustache had grown nearly as gray as the other.

She loved him with a fierce, jealous love in which

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there were many elements, and she knew that she herself went for comparatively little in his suffering. There was something else, and she could not understand what it could be.

His book, to her, was such an amazing piece of work that she could not believe that he really regretted it. Nor could she realize what his declaration of authorship would mean.

It was a bad book, but there are many such, and this one had so many redeeming qualities, from her viewpoint.

Loving him, she would have been proud to tell every one that he had achieved the novel.

Loving him, she had no pride, and would have knelt at his feet if by so doing she could have assured herself of one spark of love for her in him.

What she had begun in mischief had turned to terrible earnest for her, and the marks of mental suffering were in her face.

She did not even know whether Hardy loved her, and the hopelessness of battering at the gates of his rigid, expressionless coldness drove her nearer to madness than any Anglo-Saxon can easily understand. To have got into that book, and lived for one hour the life of Gilda Cesarini, she would have given years of her life.

Twice she had tried to see Hardy, and failed, once by her sending a message to him, begging him to come to see her, once by sending him a bank note for the poor people in the village.

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The message he had simply ignored, the money had been promptly acknowledged in a formal note of three lines.

And now there was a rumor that one of his children had diphtheria, and she had come to see Mary Yarrow, and learn through her, if possible, the truth of the report.

The butler led the way to the drawing-room, and opened the door. "Her ladyship is in the Cedar Parlor, Madame——" and crossing the floor to the opposite door, she was about to go into the small room where Lady Yarrow spent much of the time, when something arrested her feet, and she stopped short.

The Cedar Parlor, paneled, as its name indicated, with delicately carved wood, and picked out with thin lines of gilding, was but faintly lighted by a tall bronze lamp near the dying fire.

The gilding on the walls gleamed faintly, here and there, the glass fronts of china-cabinets reflected the reddish light, the air was sweet with invisible roses.

On a low chair by the fire, her baby on her knees, sat Lady Yarrow, her pure profile outlined against the glow in the grate. Near by, looking down at her, stood Jacques Woodvil.

"Of course I hated to come," he was saying, "but what could I do? One can't ignore a letter like that."

She nodded. "No. You had to come. The day he gave it to me—the letter—he said something, but not much. I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Nor I."

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There was a short silence, then the man went on :

“ He was the best fellow that ever lived, Mary ; the very best. I would take his advice on any other subject on God’s earth but this.”

“ So would I. It—must have been because he was—ill.”

Woodvil shook his head. “ No. It was not that. He always felt that way. Before I had ever seen you he tried to make me do it, and that time at Yarrow, when he saw—how things were going, he tried again.”

She drew a quick breath that was almost a sigh.

“ Then ? Oh, how *good* he was.”

Madame Perez, hidden behind the curtain, understood nothing of the conversation, but a feeling that it was in some way of importance to her, kept her in her place.

“ He was very good,” Woodvil agreed.

Mary looked up at him. “ Why don’t you sit down ? We have talked it over, we have done as he wished, we have done our best.”

He obeyed her in silence, and drew his chair a little nearer.

“ Yes, we have done as he wished, as—as nearly as possible. God knows *I* wish more had been possible.”

She was silent, bending a little lower over her baby, and then, suddenly, laying his hand on the baby’s breast very gently, he went on : “ Before I go, won’t you say—something ? Something for me to remember ? ”

“ Something—— ? ”

“ Yes. You did—the other time.”

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“ The other time, I told you that I loved you and that God was cruel to us.”

“ Yes. And—now? ”

She raised her eyes to his. “ Now I can only say—I love you, but God is *not* cruel to us.”

“ Thank you. Then you do? ”

“ Yes. *He* knew. I never stopped; I couldn't.”

Woodvil bent his curly head over the baby until his face was hidden. After a pause he rose.

“ Thank you for telling me. Ah! if I had never seen her! ”

Rosalba Woodvil understood. It was she who was the obstacle.

Without reflection she stepped out of the darkness into the faint light.

“ Jacques,” she said, abruptly, “ I have heard it all. I have been listening.”

“ Rosalba—you! ”

“ No, no—I—am so sorry for you. Lady Yarrow, I am his wife, and he would have told you, no doubt, long ago, only I made him promise not to.”

Lady Yarrow had risen, and stood white and angry, her baby pressed close to her breast.

“ You had better go, Rosalba,” Woodvil said quietly, “ you don't in the least realize what—*listening* means to English people.”

“ Wait, Jacques. I don't care a pin for what listening means to English people, but now that I know—*can't I help?* ”

“ Can't you help? You are crazy.”

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She turned to Lady Yarrow, her hands clasped.

“ In God’s name, don’t hate me now. I want to help. You love him and he loves you——”

Mary Yarrow drew away. “ I cannot possibly discuss this matter with you, Madame—Mrs. Woodvil, and I will ask you to excuse me; I am tired.”

Without another word she left the room, her black gown trailing softly over the old inlaid floor.

For a few minutes Jaques Woodvil stood looking at his wife, his face gradually softening.

“ You have done an awful thing,” he said, at length, “ but I believe you meant well. As long as you heard so much, I had better tell you that Lord Yarrow left a letter for me in which he—expressed a wish that I should divorce my wife—and marry Lady Yarrow, whom I have known for years. I was obliged to see her, as he insisted on it, but—I am leaving for India next week.”

Her eyes did not waver; she looked at him as steadily as he at her, and still he saw the curious new look in her eyes.

“ Jaques—must you go? ”

“ Must I go? ” he burst into a short laugh. “ If I stayed—what then? ”

“ Couldn’t you do as he wished. I mean, couldn’t you divorce me? ”

“ Nonsense, Rosalba. You know that I can’t—without an awful scandal.”

Taking up a box of cigarettes, he lighted one, and puffed at it impatiently.

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“ I don’t mind the scandal. And if *he* thought it right, why, it is right,” she went on doggedly. “ He was very good, and he knew.”

Woodvil took out his watch. “ It is late, and I have just time to catch my train. Good-by.”

He held out his hand. “ Jacques—at least believe that I am sorry. I admire her very much, and—I loved him.”

He did not misunderstand her meaning.

“ He deserved it. I do believe that you’re sorry, Rosalba. Good-by.”

“ Wait. You must say good-by to her. I’ll fetch her.”

Without thinking of the rebuff that probably awaited her, she hurried upstairs, and down the corridor to Lady Yarrow’s room.

“ He is going,” she said, without any preface, “ go and say good-by to him.”

Mary rose and looked at her haughtily, but the other woman was too much in earnest to mind. “ Oh, *go*,” she insisted, “ whatever *I’ve* done, he is innocent, and he may never come back.”

Lady Yarrow left the room without speaking, and Rosalba Perez followed her as far as the drawing-room door, and then, passing on, left the house.

Mary, after an instant’s hesitation, went into the Cedar Parlor, and with a few words parted once more from Jacques Woodvil.

CHAPTER XXXIII

KING HARDY had never been a happy man, but the agony he suffered during that autumn was so keen as to make the preceding years look, in retrospect, blissful to him. He had read the Bishop's letter that Sunday, in church, pronouncing the words with difficulty, but forcing himself to enunciate each one very distinctly, and in a strange monotonous voice that seemed to be that of another man. His wife's announcement to him, as he was on the point of going to the Bishop and avowing his authorship of "He and Hecuba," had taken his strength away from him. In a flash he had seen things as they had been, as they must inevitably become again should he give up the money the book was bringing him.

He shuddered as he remembered his despair a few months ago; he had even, in his bitter poverty, questioned the right of God to send him children without providing the means for bringing them up as the children of a gentleman should be brought up.

He remembered the horror of the autumn days the year before; the cold; the insufficient food; the soiled table cloths; the brutalizing untidiness of everything.

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He recalled with even greater horror the effect of these things on himself; his resentment; his weak despair, what had grown to be at times almost a loathing for the children of whom the worst side of him was ashamed.

And if he confessed to the Bishop, giving up the money he had saved, and that which was to come to him from foreign editions of his book, all these things would come back, accentuated to him a hundred-fold after the months of respite he had had.

And after all, had he the right to sacrifice his children to his own ease of conscience?

The sophistry of this reasoning he did not see, but during the four days before the Sunday on which, by reading the Bishop's letter in church, he must decide for either the one line of action or the other, he argued it over and over with himself by the hour.

The strength of his nature allowed him to keep his mind unceasingly concentrated on the problem, even while he went mechanically through his round of duties; the weakness that was in him hid from his honest eyes the falsity of his reasoning.

At last he had decided.

It was a choice of evils; a choice of suffering for him. Either by securing the peace of a quiet conscience he must ruin the lives of his wife and children, or by securing to them the comparative comfort that was theirs now, he must take to his heart a burden that would grow heavier as the years went on, and be probably, in the end, his damnation.

The effect this book had had on Madame Perez

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brought home to him more clearly than could have any number of critiques the evil of the thing he had done, and his morbid mind, exaggerating that evil, began to see in the novel fatal harm to every one who touched it.

Once, coming back from London, where he had been on business connected with his late aunt, a young girl in the carriage with him was reading the book. He watched her cut a few pages, and leaning back in her place, listlessly turn the first pages. She was a pretty girl with curly reddish hair, on which perched a fur toque trimmed with violets. While she read, Hardy studied her face; he saw the listlessness vanish, a new light come to her eyes. The charm of the thing had reached her.

Counting the pages as she turned them, he could about keep pace with her in the story.

Now she had come to the scene in the olive-grove—now she was in the dusky old church at early mass, now—it was evening in the garden——

Leaning forward he found himself saying: “ Pardon me, but—who gave you that book to read? ”

The girl started, stared at him, and then, seeing that he was a clergyman, answered, “ No one. I bought it.” Something about her upper lip reminded him of his little daughter Anna.

“ Will you excuse me for suggesting that you ask your mother to read it, before you go any further? ”

“ My mother! Is it so bad as that? ”

“ It is very bad,” he returned, gravely. “ Very.”

Smiling at him, her pretty eyes full of mischief: “Then I shouldn’t *think* of giving it to mamma. I am very particular about what she reads.”

In his earnestness he hardly understood, and she saw it.

“I beg your pardon; one gets so in the way of ‘chaffing;’ if the book is so awful I’ll not read it, and—I am sure my father would thank you for telling me, if he were here.”

With a last look at the enchanting page she closed the book and handed it to Hardy. “You must take it, though, or I can’t resist,” she said, “it is *frightfully* interesting.”

They were passing over a bridge as she spoke, and Hardy, opening the window, threw the book into the water—felt as if he had rescued the girl from everlasting flames.

The long, gray days dragged by, drenched in warm, unhealthful rain. In the village the epidemic still raged, strengthened by the bad weather, and Hardy, doing in his despair the work of three men, grew thin and old.

He had rented a long-deserted cottage not far from his own house, and there, with Tench’s help, made for himself a kind of quarantine.

In a chest of drawers, the only furniture in the house beside a bed and two wooden chairs, he kept linen and a couple of suits of clothes, and hither he came, after his visits to the infected houses, to change and fumigate himself before going home.

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For he could not keep away from the houses of mourning. Going into danger, helping with his own hands the poor suffering people, was the only way in which his tortured mind received a little calm. The precautions he took were for the sake of his family; he felt a sort of savage pleasure in risking his own life.

Mary Yarrow, shut up, on her baby's account, in her park, was his greatest help at this time. Every day she sent a great wagon-load of soup, milk, wine, and other things to Tench's temporary headquarters in the village, and whatever money was needed had only to be asked for.

When, early in December, the disease began to rage among the grown people as well as the children, Hardy wrote to her that they must have nurses, and a few days later she had provided six, from a London hospital.

Hardy at this time saw very little of his wife and children. Abby, in spite of his precautions, was in a state of helpless terror, watching the children with an agonized scrutiny, and every time Hardy touched one of them he saw in her eyes a dumb reproach.

There was in her no courage with which to meet an emergency, and pitying her, as well as vaguely relieved by being alone, he spent more and more of his spare time in the little cottage by the bridge, sleeping there, at last, almost every night. He had chosen his evil, of the two that he believed to have been offered to him, but it was a very hard one to bear, and he had not learnt to forget it.

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The memory of Madame Perez, too, was always with him. He had had the strength to put her away from him, and to refuse to see her, but he had none to prevent the picture of her standing there in his study coming to him perpetually.

The old torture of remembering the days when he had loved Silvia Aldobrandi, was gone—the demon laid by his writing the book—but this newer memory was a worthy substitute, in point of strength, to make him suffer.

He realized perfectly that he did not love Madame Perez; that his feeling for her had grown out of vanity, and was a base one. This he told himself over and over again, but it did no good.

He despised her, he almost hated her, but he longed to see her with a strength that terrified him.

Disgusted with his weakness, he struggled against it, prayed for help against it, and felt his struggles and his prayers to be in vain.

He could keep away from her, but if he should see her, whence could he take the strength to resist what he called, by a curious old-fashioned word, her wiles?

He had not lost his faith in God, he had lost his faith in himself.

One evening as he sat over his fire in the cottage, a knock came to the door, and he knew, with a reasonless, absolute surety, that Rosalba Perez stood without.

Rising very softly, he stepped across the floor and turned the key in the lock. “ Who is there ? ”

“ It is I—Rosalba.”

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“ I can not let you in.”

She laughed angrily. “ Nonsense, I won’t eat you, and it is pouring.”

“ I can not let you in.”

The ridiculous side of the situation did not occur to him, but it did to her, and she laughed again.

He was silent.

“ I told you at Mrs. Dudley’s that I was sorry ; that I had been a goose,” she went on. “ Are you *afraid* of me? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Ah! ” There was triumph in her little exclamation. “ You are afraid of me. Then—you love me.”

“ I do not love you. But——”

“ But——? ”

“ There is no use in this. I will not let you in, and you will take cold.”

He had sat down, facing the painted deal door.

“ I will go,” she said, “ if you will explain your ‘ but.’ ”

“ I was going to say that there is evil in every man, and that you appeal to the evil in me.”

She burst out laughing. “ I feel like the temptress in a play. I should wear a scarlet gown like *Athenäis* in the ‘ *Maître des Forges*.’ ”

As he did not answer, she went on, in another tone:

“ Very well; good-by, Pyramus. Dream of me.” Then she was gone.

He waited for some minutes, wondering at the incredible vulgarity of her coming to him there at that

hour; the absence of all pride in her gave him, in spite of his disdain of her, a shock.

He was, on the whole, however, glad that it had happened. He was a gentleman, and this woman, in spite of her beauty and position, could not be what he had been taught to consider a lady. The memory of his conversation through the door with her would surely help to cure him of his strange longing for her.

After a time he rose, and opened the door. A little fresh air would do him good.

Pausing for a minute on the threshold, and looking up the hill towards the light in the window where his wife, he knew, sat at work, he stepped out on the damp grass.

As he did so, a burst of mischievous laughter caused him to turn, and Madame Perez, her face glowing in the lamp-light, stood by him.

“ Caught! ” she cried. “ Poor little bird! ”

He did not attempt to control the expression of his eyes, and as she caught it, she flinched.

“ Ah, yes—vulgar and base,” she said, pushing back the shawl she wore over her head.

“ My good man, have you *no* sense of humor? Can you not see that it was all a comedy? Do you seriously believe that I love you? ”

He flinched in his turn. “ My sense of humor, whatever it may be, is quite beside the question, Mrs. Woodvil. I do not understand you, that is true enough. What *you* do not understand, apparently, is that I have no wish to study you—and no time. My opinion of the way

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in which you lower your womanhood by doing as you have done, would not interest you, so—I will say good-night.”

Bowing very low, he passed her and went into the cottage.

CHAPTER XXXIV

“ Oh, King, if you had only listened to me! ”

It was a very gentle, pitiful reproach, but it stung him sharply as he looked into her wan eyes and sought for an answer that he could not find.

“ You could do no good in the village,” she went on, wringing the thin hands, “ and, now——”

A low, muffled wail coming from the half-open door near which they stood, interrupted her. “ Oh, my God, my God! ” she exclaimed, as she left him.

He stood still in the dimly-lighted corridor, looking after her, seeing her still after she had gone; a thin, shapeless figure in a loose dressing-gown, with untidy, scanty hair, and a drawn, thin face.

She was so pitiably thin.

Through the half-open door he could see part of the bed, the table laden with bottles, glasses, spoons, the quiet figure of the nurse rising as his wife went in.

The clock struck eleven; Tench said he would come before midnight.

Slowly, feeling his own uselessness, he went downstairs and into his study, his head fallen forward on his breast.

It was Christmas eve, and the irony of it brought a smile to his grim face.

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Christmas eve, and Anna was lying there being choked to death by the horrible film in her throat; and the germ of that film *he* had brought to her. Had given it to her with a kiss, probably, or a touch of the hand. It was characteristic of the man that he did not give the least consideration to the fact of his having undoubtedly taken all possible precautions against infection; what he had done was of no avail, hence of no importance; as a punishment for his sin, God had made him the cause of his child's death.

Rigidly, doggedly, he accepted this view of the case, and made no excuses, asked no extenuation.

He had been living on the devil's bounty, and thanking God for it; now he knew better.

Madame Perez had gone out of his mind altogether; he had not unduly blamed himself for his feeling for her, for he looked on her as a wicked woman who deliberately tempted him.

Now he had forgotten her, and could think only of the children God had sent into the world to be ruined by him, their father. A sudden blasphemous doubt quivered through him. God?

Tench found him crouched in the low chair by his empty grate, his face almost blank with the exhaustion of prolonged mental suffering.

"Come, come, Hardy, this won't do," the little doctor exclaimed, one hand laid on the other man's shoulder. "You are nothing but skin and bone now, and you will die if you let yourself go on in this way."

"God has let me go, Tench."

“ Nonsense, man. Come, your wife wants you. You must be brave for her sake.”

“ And Anna? ”

“ Anna can not live through the night, Hardy. I have done all I could.”

Hardy rose without a word, and walked steadily upstairs. Abby was sitting by the bed, watching the distorted face of the agonized child. “ Pray, King! ” she said, as he entered, and obediently he fell on his knees.

No words came, however, and dumbly they waited. That for which they waited came quietly at dawn, and then Hardy carried his wife into the next room and laid her on the bed.

He himself was conscious of nothing but an overwhelming fatigue, and, sitting down by the frosted window, fell into a sleep that lasted until morning.

The next day passed dully, and on Tuesday, MacDougall sickened.

Hardy had never loved this child as much as he had the others; he was a clumsy, fretful, unattractive boy who had all his short life given trouble in one way or another. Now, suddenly, the father-love tacitly denied him sprang up in Hardy’s heart, and it seemed to the man as if this child was the one for whom he could sacrifice any two of the others. Remorse had laid his heavy hand on him once more. Tench at first was hopeful, then suddenly, one noon, the child died. The children had all been taken, on the first signs of Anna’s illness, down to the hospitable house beyond the village,

where kind Miss Tench had so often harbored them, but MacDougall had been brought home as soon as the nature of his symptoms had declared themselves, and Hardy and his wife and the faithful Katie had lived there in quarantine ever since, aided by the nurse Mary Yarrow sent, and whose presence was accepted as a matter of course by the Rector and his wife.

The day MacDougall was buried, it rained, and the wind and dampness were acceptable to Hardy as he read the short service.

He had reached the pitch of mental numbness, and hardly realized, as he repeated the solemn words, that the child in the little coffin was his own. February had gone, and spring would soon be coming; there, on the bank opposite the churchyard, the first violets always came. He raised his heavy eyes and looked up the dingy, rain-soaked slope. Violets.

When he reached home it hardly shocked him to find his wife gone to bed with a bad throat. It was all of a piece with the rest. It was his punishment; she would die; he would live on; it was God's Vengeance.

That God sets Mercy before Vengeance, did not occur to him. His eyes had never been darkened by thoughts of pity; he believed in the old God of the Old Testament, and as he had sinned, that God was bound to punish him.

It was part of his punishment that he should live. Blessed Death was not yet for him. The doctor looked very grave after his short examination of Mrs. Hardy, but could not yet be sure of the nature of her illness.

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The next day, a Sunday, he was sure. It was diphtheria.

Hardy listened to him very quietly, assented to all that he said, and then went upstairs.

“ Oh, King,” the sick woman began at once, “ you will be all alone! ”

“ Yes. All alone.” That she might recover did not occur to either of them as a possibility.

He sat holding her hand for a time in silence, and then began to speak, slowly, distinctly, in methodically arranged words.

“ Abby, this is all my fault.”

“ No, King; no, dear. You did everything the doctor told you—Oh, my head aches so! ”

“ It is my fault. Years ago, when I was young, I committed a terrible sin. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small! ”

She looked up blankly. “ What mills, dear? We have plenty of flour—King, my head aches so! ”

When night came, he still sat beside her, her hot hand in his cold ones.

CHAPTER XXXV

LADY YARROW had not seen Madame Perez since that day in early November when Woodvil had gone away, and now it was the third of March.

Shortly after the curious interview in the Cedar Parlor, Borrowdaile House had presented to the world a blank face; little Lord Yarrow and his mother had gone to spend the holidays with Lady Sally Wincott, near Yarrow, the great place that had been closed since the death of the old lord.

Lady Sally lived in a charming house, every inch of which Lady Yarrow knew, as she had spent her motherless girlhood there, and been married under its roof. The mistress of the house, a clever, asthmatic woman, now growing older and sharper-tongued than of yore, welcomed her two guests with delight, and was enthusiastic enough about the baby to satisfy even his rather exigent mother.

“Rebecca wrote me all the particulars,” she said, one morning, as the two ladies sat together in the cheerful drawing-room, both busy with needle-work. “I am glad he lived to see his son, poor fellow.”

Mary looked up. “Yes. It made us both very happy.”

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“ Happy! Well—h’m—perhaps happy is hardly the word, Mary.”

“ I think it is, Aunt Sally.”

“ He was *dying*, my love.”

The younger woman did not speak for a moment, for her aunt, of whom she was very fond, was not the person she would have chosen as a confidante.

Then, as she had no alternative but that of a silence which began to tell on her nerves, she went on:

“ I don’t think he minded dying.”

Lady Sally’s thread broke with a snap. “ Not mind dying! Then, my dear, you hadn’t made him happy. A man who has a new-born son doesn’t want to die if he is happy.”

Mary turned her face, a little worn and aged, to the window, about which the bare boughs of the birches tossed drearily.

“ Dear Aunt Sally, do you know, you are the only blood-relation I have in the world? You mustn’t be unkind to me, when I come to you for sympathy.”

“ Unkind, Mary? I don’t want to be that; but you are hard to understand.”

“ You used to say I had no conscience; do you remember? You were wrong, for I have so much, so much! Too much, I have often thought, for Yarrow was right in saying that I couldn’t help it.”

“ Help what? ” Lady Sally looked up alertly. She was fond of her niece, but Mary had never before made any of the ordinary uses of the blood-tie that bound them; her aunt had never got near her, and she knew it.

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Lady Yarrow rose, and taking the baby from the nest of cushions on a sofa where he was sleeping, came back to her chair.

“ Aunt Sally—you remember Jacques Woodvil? ”

“ Of course I do, and I must say I considered it, well, to say the least—imprudent of Yarrow to have him at Borrowdaile.”

“ Imprudent? What do you mean? ”

Lady Sally did not dare say what she had meant, nor, as she looked at her niece, was she quite sure of having meant anything at all.

“ Yarrow knew all about it,” Mary went on, when the sudden change in the old lady’s expression had pacified her anger.

“ He knew all about it before I married him. And he never forgot it. And he also knew—what I couldn’t help—that I never forgot—Jacques. Aunt Sally, tell me—tell *us*, that I really did my best! ”

Lady Sally was embarrassed. She was an intensely practical woman, with little understanding of any kind of sentimentality, and this sudden emotional appeal from her self-contained niece troubled her.

She had not been there to see; she knew little of what Mary had done in the matter—how could she tell her that she had done her best?

“ My dear child,” she said slowly, “ I hope you did. Borrowdaile—Yarrow was a very good man.”

Mary held her little Yarrow closer, and looked into his face.

“ I did try,” she said, very low. “ And in a way

I loved him better than any one in the world. He was so good that I would have cut off my right hand to have been to him all that he needed—to give to him all he deserved! It is this that has so tormented me, Aunt Sally. I did my best, but it was not enough. I gave him almost everything, but that one little part of me I couldn't give him, and he knew it. And he was so good! ”

She broke off with a little cry of pain.

Lady Sally fought savagely against her own dumbness for a moment, and then, suddenly, bent over the sleeping baby. “ *Mary*, how he looks like his father! ”

And then the much-needed tears came, and Mary Yarrow let them fall unheeded on the little face on her bosom, for they were good tears and could not hurt it. She told her aunt about Yarrow's letter to Woodvil; that Woodvil had come to her, and that he had left her as he left her years ago, because he was tied to a worthless woman.

Lady Sally's amazement at the identity of the beautiful Madame Perez, with the woman in question, knew no bounds, and her indignation with Woodvil for tamely submitting to his bondage, brought back a smile to her niece's sad face.

“ Aunt Sally, Aunt Sally, you an advocate for divorcee! What would the Rector say! ”

“ I don't care, my dear, it is absurd. He has every right to get rid of her, and he ought to do it—for your sake. ”

Mary's face was a little proud as she dabbed her

tears gently from her baby's face. "He has no—*right* to do anything for my sake, Aunt Sally—and I have my son."

The winter, which brought such disaster to Carbury, was mild and pleasant in more healthful Yarrow, and Lady Yarrow's placid face soon bore no sign of other than a natural grief, while the little Yarrow grew strong and rosy.

Once or twice Mary heard from Mr. Dudley; then he was called to the Riviera to a dying sister, and for several weeks she heard no news from Borrowdaile. One day in early February, she received a letter from King Hardy, asking for more money for his poor people, and telling briefly of the continued distress in his village.

When she sent the check, she wrote him, asking for a more comprehensive account of the epidemic, and also asking casually for news of Madame Perez.

Hardy in replying said: "I have not seen Madame Perez for several weeks, but believe that she is still here. Some one, I forget who, told me that she is very much afraid of diphtheria, and hardly leaves her house in consequence of that fear."

The day following the receipt of this letter, Lady Yarrow wrote to Madame Perez, sending her her long-meditated, never-accomplished, words of pardon.

"DEAR MRS. WOODVIL—I fear that I was very rude to you the day your husband left my house, but I was much upset for several reasons, none of which, I am sure, it is necessary to specify to you. I see now that

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you meant to be kind in what you said, and I am sorry I could not see this at the time. Will you kindly let me know something of your plans for the future? It is better to tell you frankly that I shall make mine so as to avoid seeing you again, though I can say, with perfect truth, that I wish you well. If you are staying on at Liscorn, I shall go abroad for the present, but if you are leaving, I shall come home early in April.

“ Yours, very truly,

“ MARY YARROW.”

She carried this letter herself to the post-office, and coming back another way, passed through a little, long-neglected park, and by a quaint red-brick house, overgrown with creepers, the blind windows of which looked to her as sad as blind eyes.

In this house had lived the dearest friend she had ever had, an old woman who had died shortly after her marriage.

It had been on much such a day, six years before, that she had rushed up the path to the house, full of remorse and sorrow, to undo a wrong she had wantonly done in a blind rage with the whole world, on learning of Jacques Woodvil's marriage.

And how gentle and understanding the old lady had been, and how——

It all came back to her so clearly as she stood on the soft grass and gazed at the closed windows. Life seemed to her a very sad thing as she went slowly homeward. Even Yarrow, who had been to her an angel, had had no real reward. She had been unable to forget Wood-

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vil, and cruel chance had brought him back into her life only to leave it emptier than before. Then, for she was a well-strung nature, with sound nerves, she forced her thoughts into other channels, and walked rapidly home to her baby.

A week passed before a letter came from Madame Perez.

“DEAR LADY YARROW,” it said, “You are right in thinking that I would have helped you if I could. It is better for you yourself to render me justice. As to my plans, I go away the first of April, so you may come home then. Before I say good-bye to you, let me add one word. If I have been wicked, as it seems I have, I have got ‘paid out’ now. You may think yourself unhappy, and you may be, but your life is Heaven to mine. You have done no wrong; you are good, and the man you love respects as well as loves you. You can be at peace with yourself. I, if I were not a coward, would kill myself to-day.

“ROSALBA WOODVIL.”

Lady Yarrow could make little of these words, and after a futile attempt at answering them, gave it up, and put the memory of the woman away from her. Thus for her February passed quickly; uneventfully.

And March came.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PERHAPS it can not be said that Rosalba Woodvil's acute pain during those weeks arose from an awakened conscience. Possibly the conscience becomes atrophied from lack of use, and it is certain that she herself would have jeered at the thought of her ever having had such a moral vermiform appendix. However, her sufferings were surely out of all proportion to any realization of wrong-doing she may have had years before during her life with Woodvil. She had loved her cousin, and though she of course knew she was doing wrong, had never had any innate conviction of the guilt of loving him.

Hardy's mental attitude towards her had two effects. It had made her vividly ashamed of her past, and it had increased her love for him to an almost maddening extent.

During the first days of the epidemic, she had stayed at home, trembling at every sound, almost fainting when the bell rang. He was going to die.

Then, as time went on and he did not take the disease, she grew calmer.

She herself was afraid of infection, and having forbidden all her servants to go to Carbury, and rarely leaving her own grounds, the news she heard was slight and rare.

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Then came Lady Yarrow's letter. Over and over again the other woman read it, and the oftener she did so the stronger grew her conviction that Mary Yarrow was a very good woman, and that she, Rosalba, would do almost anything to help her. It was not her fault that Woodvil, true to the spirit of his mother's religion, refused to divorce her. She had begged him to do so, and feeling that her unselfishness in enduring the scandal of a divorce for the good of another woman would raise her in Hardy's eyes, she wrote her husband again and again, urging him to come back to England and obtain his freedom.

This she did not tell Mary, merely writing her the few words that puzzled Lady Yarrow, and accepting stolidly the unbroken silence that followed her impulsive note. When Anna Hardy died, Rosalba wrote to town for flowers, which she sent with her card to Hardy, but which he did not acknowledge.

Then followed the death of the second child.

The lonely woman in the great house, childless, unimaginative, selfish, felt in her love for the man, a pain almost as keen as his own. "Ugly little creatures," she said aloud, with a shrug, "but they are *his*."

This time she sent no flowers, but wrote him a note, writing as any warm friend might do.

This effort, too, met with no response.

The next day as she sat in the red room, a servant came in. "Poor Mrs. Hardy is took, too, ma'am," the woman said. "The butcher's boy just saw the Rector."

Rosalba rose. "Where? Where did he see him?"

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“ In our village, ma’am. He was at the apothecary’s. Ibbetts says he looks just terrible.”

Five minutes later the inhabitants of Borrowdaile were surprised by the sight of Madame Perez walking down the village street wrapped in a dark shawl from head to foot. She walked quickly, seeing no one until she came face to face with Hardy at a turning.

“ At last,” she said, joining him and going up the steep lane through which he was making a short cut homeward. “ You have lost your poor little children,” she went on, before he could speak. “ You know I am sorry. And now she, your wife, is ill.”

“ Yes. Aren’t you afraid of infection? ”

“ No. I am afraid of nothing, now.”

“ You had better go back. It is rough walking here, and you will get wet feet.”

She laughed, and stopping, caught his arm and held up one of her feet. They were clad in little fur-trimmed sapphire-velvet slippers.

“ You are crazy,” he said roughly.

“ I ran out to see you—*Ré*,” she retorted, calling him by the rolling Spanish equivalent of his name. “ You must know that I am suffering with you. I am sorry for you.”

His grim face softened. “ I believe you. Thanks. Now—I must hurry. I have fetched medicine.”

He raised his hat hurriedly, showing suddenly whitened hair and a brow wrinkled as that of an old man, and left her. Then she turned and went back to Liscom House.

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Hardy climbed the hill, crossed the bridge, and went on to his desolate home. The meeting with Rosalba Woodvil had had absolutely no significance for him. All his thoughts, confused and dim, were centered in the room upstairs where his wife lay, her poor eyes fixed, he knew, on the door through which he should come.

The nurse met him and took the medicine without a word, and together they went upstairs.

“ Master seems fair dazed,” Katie told the baker’s boy the next morning from the window. “ It’s a good thing he ain’t got no ’ope, though. The ups and downs is too awful.”

“ She’s going to die then? I say, Katie, you’re getting plump.”

“ Plump, indeed. Get out, Billy Haver. This is no time for your nonsense. Yes, the nurse says it’s a bad case.”

Katie was crying. She was fond of her mistress, she was full of pity for her master and the children, and she was of an emotional nature and thoroughly enjoyed her own misery.

Abby Hardy died as she had lived—patient, pitiful. At the last she could not speak, but her pale eyes, so expressionless in life, grew eloquent, and Hardy answered nearly all of her unasked questions. Yes, the children were all well. Baby had cut a tooth. The Tenches would keep them until the house was safe—then, sending the nurse out of the room, he went on. “ Abby, my poor girl, I have made you unhappy. I’m

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a bad, weak fool, and you have been good to me. Yes, yes, I know, you love me. You have been a good woman—you must ask God to forgive me——”

Contrary to Tench's entreaties and orders, Hardy insisted on burying his wife himself.

He met the coffin at the churchyard gate, as he met all the dead of his parish, and walked by it to the grave. Tench, Katie, and the nurse, were almost the only onlookers, for all the gentry in the neighborhood had gone away, as the panic grew serious, and the villagers were afraid of the raw, bleak wind that blew.

Hardy's voice was firm, and he read the beautiful service most poetically.

As he came to the words, “Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts,” he glanced up from his book for a second, and his eyes fell on Rosalba Woodvil, who stood a little to one side, a rosary in her hands.

Her eyes held his for a fraction of a minute and then suddenly a flush came to her face, and her eyes glowed with a golden light. She realized that he was now free.

And Hardy, seeing her thought, stumbled in his reading, lost his place, and paused.

The little group around the grave stared open-mouthed, and the doctor, fearing a sudden loss of strength, went quickly up to Hardy as if to help him. The Rector did not notice him.

For a minute he stared blankly before him, and then suddenly raised his voice, and said angrily: “Go. You have no right here. Go!”

In her amazement the woman obeyed, and before Tench could speak, Hardy had taken up the thread of the service and went on steadily to the end.

The little doctor, disturbed and distressed, foreseeing the scandal the scene would give rise to, whispered as he left the churchyard that Hardy had a high fever, and that he, Tench, feared he was on the point of falling ill.

On his way across the fields to Borrowdaile, he overtook Madame Perez, as he believed her to be, and once more advanced his theory as to the cause of Hardy's unheard-of behavior.

"He is on the point of breaking down," the good little man went on, "and God knows he has had enough to make him."

"Ah, yes. Very much trouble."

The beautiful woman spoke absently, but Tench saw that she was not at all offended with Hardy, and he went his way thoughtful.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HARDY went home, and locking himself into his study, sat down and tried to collect his thoughts, which had been wavering and wandering for days. It had not occurred to him that he might be going mad; indeed that thought rarely comes to those whose minds are really on the point of slipping from the hinges.

On the contrary, it seemed to him that he was at last punished enough, that God's just wrath must be appeased, and that he would probably die.

It would be asking too much to demand living from a man in his condition. He could not live, so he must be going to die.

Languidly he looked around the little room; at the photographs, recently taken, on the chimney-piece; at the new curtains at the windows; at the crystal ink-stand the children had given him for Christmas.

A curious smell of burning was in the air; it was the nurse disinfecting the house; he had noticed on coming up the path that all the upper windows were wide opened to the purifying wind.

The rest of the children would soon be coming home. He wondered vaguely how many there were left. They would come home—or no. First, he must die, and be put out of the way. He wondered whether Madame

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Perez would come to mock at his funeral too. Who would read the service over him?

Probably Dr. Dudley, who was expected home in a few days. His sister had died. Everybody died.

After a time Katie knocked at his door to ask if he would have tea.

He told her that he did not wish to be disturbed; that he was going to lie down.

Evening drew on, and night shut down softly over the world. The grayness of the sea seemed to steal up to meet the blackness of the sky, and all was still. In a tree outside one of his windows, a bird's nest hung, and as the darkness grew, a star seemed to rest on it like a bird. Hardy wondered whether, if he climbed the tree, he could catch the star, or whether it would fly away.

At last, he fell asleep, and slept for hours. When he awoke he was stiff and lame all over. Sitting up, he swallowed once or twice. Yes, his throat was sore. It was all right. He lit the lamp, drew down the curtains, and made a fire. It was very chill and cold. Some one moved overhead. Abby looking after one of the children. No, Abby was dead.

He looked at the clock and saw that it was nearly ten o'clock.

Katie knocked again, and when he sent her away, she went to bed with a satisfied feeling that his grief was all that it ought to be. She would tell every one that he did not eat a bite all the day of the funeral.

Hardy cowered over the fire, drawing a vague com-

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fort from the warmth, and then, suddenly, rose and opened a window. If he kept himself warm, he might get well.

It was cold and still outside; a sea-fog had crept in landward, and hung pall-like on the trees. Some of the children were playing in the garden; he heard MacDougall's grating little voice. It was a pity the child had such a disagreeable voice. No, MacDougall was dead.

The pain in his throat was worse, and his head swam so that he held to the window-frame for support.

Suddenly Madame Perez stood by him, wrapped in the long shawl that made such beautiful folds on her tall figure.

"I—I couldn't stay away," she stammered. "I had to see you."

Hardy looked at her stupidly. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Let me come in, it is cold. What do I want? Listen." She pushed by him, closed the window, and drew him to the fire.

"Lady Yarrow comes back the day after to-morrow, and I must go to-morrow; I promised her."

Hardy put his hand to his head. "You promised her—I don't understand."

"Because she will not see me again. I am Jacques Woodvil's wife—you see?"

With a little exclamation in Spanish over his dullness, she hurried on: "She loves Jacques and he, her. Mon Dieu! And they can't marry because of me."

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Hardy put out his hand and touched her arm hesitatingly.

“ You ought to die, too, you know,” he said, with a grave conviction in his husky voice.

She laughed. “ Ah, die! No, I am going to *live*. You and I are going to live, King. And they shall marry—the two saints.”

“ He can not marry until you die,” he repeated, vaguely.

“ He *can*. You and I go away together, *alma di mi alma*, you and I, now, to-night. Then he *must* divorce me. It would be too much.”

“ Too much. Ah, yes.”

“ And you and I; what do we care, ‘ *Hubert Branscombe* ’ ? Ah, I know that you love me. And I love you, and we will live, you and I! ”

Breaking into a torrent of Spanish she knelt by the chair into which he had sunk and caught him in her arms. “ And it is a *good* deed! It makes room for her, for Mary Yarrow. Even the Church will forgive us. The Church understands. Ah, *mi Re, mi Re!* ”

Hardy pushed her away and rose. He understood now, and remembered everything.

“ Go,” he said sternly, “ you are a wicked woman, and I hate you. I have been punished, I am going to die, and you would ruin me again. Go! ”

“ King! ” she stammered, cowering with uplifted hands, “ you are mad! ”

“ I am not mad, thank God. I have been mad, I am ill and I did not understand. Now I am sane

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again. Listen. I do not love you. I never did. God has not let me love any woman. Twice I have thought that I did—another man's wife, long ago, and my own wife, later. Neither was real love. Real love is a mixture of many things, no one of which alone can be called by the name. Earth and dew and light and life make a rose, but no one of them alone is a rose. You are a beautiful woman, but I never loved you. And you—you do not love me. You, too, cannot love. Now I see, now I know."

"You are a fool," she cried harshly, "a poor fool!"

"Yes. I am a poor fool. But I have repented of my sin and I have been punished, and now—God is going to forgive me."

He raised his haggard face to the sky, in which many stars shone. For the first time in his life the certainty of mercy had come to him. After a long pause, he added gently, "You must go now. This house is dangerous."

"I am not afraid."

The clock struck midnight.

"And—if any one should see you——"

"Ah, bah! What do I care? Tell me that again. That you do not love me."

"Yes. I do not love you."

"And you never did?"

"No. I never did."

"But I! You lie when you say I do not love you. I do! I love you, and only you. I would die for one kind word from you."

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He started. "I do not mean to be unkind, and—I forgot. I have the diphtheria. It is coming on me. You must go."

For a minute she stared at him, and then, with one movement, flung off her shawl, and springing at him caught him about the neck and kissed him repeatedly on the mouth. "Ah, then I, too, will have it. I, too! Give it to me," she gasped. "I, too, will die."

Weak and ill, he could not contend with her spasmodic, frantic strength, and when she at last released him, fell heavily into a chair.

Then, suddenly, the terror of death caught her, and with a cry she rushed out into the night, uttering short, sharp ejaculations of fear.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A MONTH later Mary Yarrow, Mr. Dudley, and Tench sat together in the library of Borrowdaile House.

Lady Yarrow was very pale, and her hands shook as she made the tea and poured it into the graceful cups.

Mr. Dudley watched her some time in silence, and when she had given him bread and butter and settled back in her chair, he began abruptly: "Suppose you tell us all about it, Tench. One hears all sorts of tales, and it is better that Lady Yarrow should know the truth from you yourself, though I wrote her——"

Tench nodded. "Yes."

The firelight played fantastically on the beautiful old paneling of the walls and ceiling, and made quaint shadows behind the old-fashioned dimity-covered chairs.

As Tench told his story, Mary Yarrow, who had but just come home, looked absently about the room, her souvenirs of the last meeting with one of the people concerned in the tale mingling with the present. Then, her baby had been but a few weeks old; now, he was a big ruddy fellow of eight months—a personality, and a companion.

Then it had been autumn, with sad rain on the windows and dying leaves fluttering through the heavy air; now mid-May had come, there were flowers in the

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garden, and the plowed-up earth about the village was rich with green.

Tench had folded his hands, the ill-shaped little hands that had done so many kind things, and was speaking.

“ I was just going to bed, as I said,” he went on, “ when I heard the gate click, and, instead of going upstairs, opened the door. There she stood in a white gown, limp with the fog, as even an angel’s garments must have been in such a one. I asked her to come in, and she fell on her knees, begging me to save her life. Naturally, I thought she had gone mad, but I could see that she was in for at least a bad cold, and calling my sister, I got a dressing-gown warmed and put on her, and then she sat with a pair of my slippers on. She wouldn’t say a word before Maria, but when we were alone again, she began at once begging me to save her life. ‘ I’ll have diphtheria and die,’ she wailed, clasping her throat. Cowardice is a disgusting sight to a doctor; we see a good deal of it, too.”

“ But also much beautiful patience, Tench,” interrupted the Rector.

“ Oh, yes, patience, of course. Well, little by little I got it out of her that she had been—of all places in the world—at poor Hardy’s. She talked very wildly—” the little man broke off in some embarrassment and glanced uneasily at Lady Yarrow.

“ She—she was certain she had caught the disease from him, and of course I couldn’t say definitely that she hadn’t. It was too soon. I was sorry for her, for her nerves were in a bad state, but such a total lack of

reserve is very embarrassing. And when she repeated that Hardy was ill, I, of course, bundled her off as quickly as I could, and went up to look after Hardy."

The speaker broke off again.

"I gathered, in two words, from what she said, that she was Mr. Woodvil's wife, and that she, well—that she, in short, was in love with Hardy."

The Rector stroked his thin knees pitifully, as if they had been Hardy's. "Poor fellow, poor fellow," he said softly.

"I found Hardy very ill, with a high fever and a terrible throat. Of course I couldn't ask him any questions, and I saw that he imagined the visit of Madame—Mrs.—*h'm!*—of the lady in question, to have been a dream. It was just as well, and I never corrected the impression. He died of heart-failure, as you know, which was a very mereiful death."

There was a short pause, after which Mary asked, without looking up, "And she?"

"She sickened the third day and sent for me. When I told her what it was, she telegraphed Sir John and Dr. Prothero, as I've told you."

The Rector cleared his throat. "Poor woman."

"Yes. Father Bingham came and I believe she took the Communion. The room smelt of burnt wax when I came that morning. She was unconscious most of the time, and—and—talked a good deal—raved, you know. She was afraid to die, a thing that happens more seldom than one might think, my lady."

Mary nodded. "Yes."

“ But she insisted on knowing about her condition, and at length I had to tell her that there was no hope. She thanked me, though she could hardly speak, and turned away. An hour later they called me—and it was all over. Where she got the pistol, God only knows.”

The Rector leaned over and poked the fire gently.

“ She was afraid to await God’s time, poor soul. May He be merciful to her.”

Tench rose. His task was done, and its accomplishment had been made easy for him.

“ My sister sends her respects, Lady Yarrow,” he said, as she gave him her hand, “ and she will come to-morrow, as you wrote, to talk over the children. We are fond of them, and—are glad that your great goodness enables us to keep them.”

“ It would be a pity to break up what remains of the family,” she said. “ I am glad I can help.”

When the doctor had gone, Lady Yarrow caught up a shawl that lay on a chair, and taking the Rector’s arm, said: “ Now we will go, uncle dearest. People who have dear dead surely can not doubt the immortality of the soul. Imagine Yarrow being *nothing* now! ”

“ Yes, my dear, you are right. I have felt all day as though he were with us. Mind you, don’t tell Rebecca that,” he added with a little laugh. They crossed the spongy lawn and the shadowy park, to the road, and after a few minutes reached the churchyard.

Lord Yarrow had had a horror of stone vaults and lay under the grass just by the entrance to the family burial-place.

Lady Yarrow carried a basket, and when they had reached the grave, knelt by it and set down her light burden.

The Reetor, taking a trowel from his coat-tail pocket, and giving it to her, they set to work to plant about the mound a row of crocuses.

It was growing dark, but they worked quickly, and when they rose, the basket empty, the soft-voiced old church clock boomed six into the evening air.

Mary Yarrow paused. "He would be glad, Uncle Charles," she said.

"*Is glad, my dear, is glad.*" And they went their way, believing it.

At the house-door they separated.

"Thank you, dear old man, you have helped me in sorrow and in joy. Give my love to—Aunt Rebecca."

He laughed half-sadly, as old people do at the joy of the young, for he knew what a world of happiness lay beneath the simple words, and baring his head to her, trotted off down the avenue, the newly risen moon caricaturing his bent back and bowed legs in his bouncing shadow.

Mary Yarrow watched him out of sight, and then turned to go in. Dinner was at eight. As she went up the steps to the door, a long, piercing shriek, mellowed by distance and dampness, reached her ears. A soft blush crept up to her brow.

It was the train.

(1)

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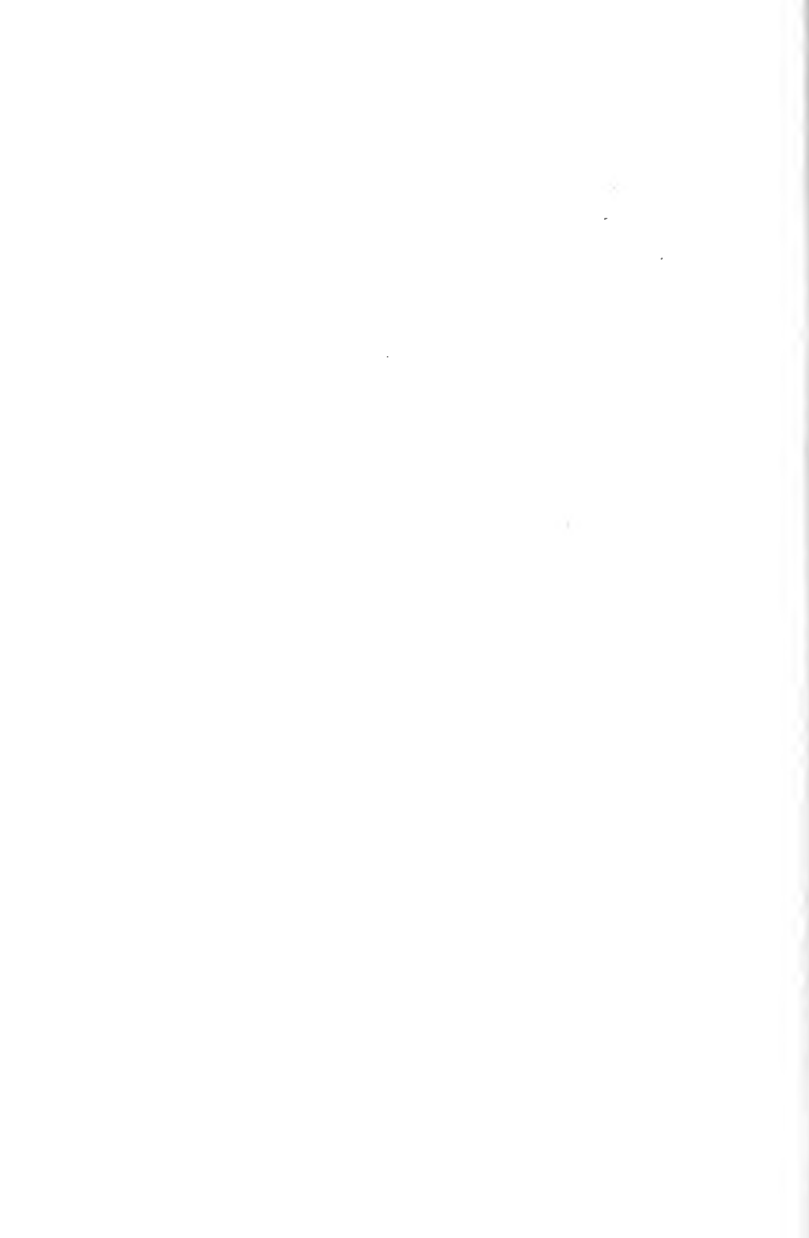
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